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No 26

JOCKEY SAM
or Riding for Fortune



BY
ERNEST A YOUNG

Crack! The rail gave way, Sam pitched forward, and down shot his form, alighting squarely upon the shoulders of the ruffian.

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JOCKEY SAM; OR, Riding for Fortune.

By ERNEST A. YOUNG.

CHAPTER I.

SAM TALBOT AND THE RUNAWAY.

"Twenty-three cents and a trousers button," counted Sam Talbot. And he reflectively jingled the money and collateral in the bottom of a pocket which was certainly deep enough to have contained much more than it did.

For a moment he continued to sit and gaze pensively down the long vista of a broad, tree-shaded highway, where, in the distance, he discerned a small cloud of dust that was approaching with remarkable rapidity.

"That outfit is coming at a spanking good gait, sure!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he perceived that the nucleus of the dust cloud was a team of some sort.

He arose from his seat on the mossy bank, and craned his neck to gain a better view of the approaching vehicle. And he was thrilled as he perceived the latter to be a sulky such as horsemen use, and that it was without an occupant.

"What a beauty!" flashed through his mind, as the runaway drew near, and he was able to take in with a critical eye all the points of equine perfection. And in the same breath he exclaimed, aloud:

"That filly must be stopped! She'll be cutting her legs, or do some mischief to herself at this rate. She isn't much frightened, but with a clear road before her and nobody to say whoa, she'd run herself to death."

The next moment the youth was standing almost in the track of the running horse, his slim figure bent for a spring, and his active muscles quivering in anticipation of the strain to be put upon them.

He did not shout nor wave his arms, as so many would have done under the same conditions. As he had said, the horse did not appear to be really frightened; yet, in her nervous condition, it would have been easy to render her frantic.

"Hi, there—hi, my girl!" he exclaimed, in a persuasive tone, as the runaway came nearly alongside. At the same time he ran swiftly a yard or two beside the horse, without touching her, and as the sulky came up with, and was passing him, he vaulted upon the narrow seat.

The reins were dragging upon the ground. But Sam did not attempt to seize them. It was upon the back of a horse, rather than behind one that he felt most at ease. To spring from the sulky to the back of the runaway was not a difficult feat, and in a flash it was accomplished.

The weight of the youth's body had the immediate effect of accelerating the pace of the horse; but the voice of the rider, still low and persuasive, accompanied by a reassuring touch upon the steed's moist neck, with as yet no restraining pull on the bit, was a course of treatment which the animal was quick to respond to.

"Easy, my girl," said Sam, cautiously obtaining control of the reins with his right hand, while he continued to caress with his left. "Easy we are. W'oa, my girl! that's it! Good girl, we are!"

Gently, by degrees, the horse became conscious of a guiding hand, and she surrendered her liberty with a willingness that surprised even her rider, who well knew that all runaways are actuated either by impulses of equine fright or perversity, and

that violence only increases the mad purpose of the animal in either case.

In less time than it has required to write these details the spirited young animal was brought to a full stop, and the youth slipped from her back, and, still talking to her in the gentle, friendly way, patting her arched neck and stroking her velvety face, he sought to become better acquainted with the horse which he had saved from the consequences of her headlong flight.

"She is a beauty, now, isn't she?" was his admiring comment, repeated a dozen times as his eye perceived new points of perfection to excite his enthusiasm.

"And what a gait she was getting when I first saw her kicking the dust. That sulky looks as if the owner was training her to trot, but she's good for something better, if I know what's what. Didn't she act as if she liked the feel of me on her back? She has been run at the track, or I'll miss a cent. But how did she get loose? And whose filly is she? I don't see a sign of anybody coming after her. We'll see."

With a parting caress, the youth got into the sulky once more, turned the team around in the broad road, and started back at an easy pace which the horse would have been glad to better had he been disposed to allow the test.

Sam Talbot, with his well-worn, dusty clothes, looked little better than a tramp. And, if the truth must be told, the last few days of his life had been spent in tramping.

Perhaps Sam was really lazy, as some who thought they knew him well had declared. Perhaps there was some other reason for his refusing to saw up half a cord of wood in payment for a breakfast of salt pork and "warmed-over" potatoes, which were the terms and bill of fare which he had been offered at a farmhouse a few hours before we made his acquaintance. At all events, he paid a quarter for the meal instead of tackling the woodpile, with the result of leaving him in a financial strait which there appeared to be no immediate prospect of remedying.

But as he sped along the pleasant strip of road behind the spirited young horse, Sam was for the time oblivious of the low ebb reached by the cash capital in his pocket.

He was going in the direction which would bring him to the city of Springfield, the destination he had most prominently in mind at the time. And he was traveling in a style which suited him far better than riding "Shank's mare," as he had been doing for nearly a week.

"Queer where the driver of this mare went to," he mused, as nearly two miles had been traversed without encountering any sign of a search and pursuit of the runaway.

"That is a horsey-looking chap," he exclaimed, at length, as he perceived another sulky with a driver approaching at a smooth pace.

Sam drew up slightly as they came alongside, expecting the stranger to speak. But the latter merely gave him a quizzical stare as he sped by.

"I'm glad this filly isn't his, anyhow," said the youth, after the other had passed. "For if that fellow didn't have an evil eye in his head then I don't know when I see one. He wouldn't have stared at me harder if I had been a lobster. And there he is, looking back at me, this minute, with his head tipped over one way, and his hat tilted the other. I hate to see a man carry his head in that fashion."

The stranger was, indeed, staring back at the boy in a rather disagreeable way; although it would have been impossible for Sam to have told why the stranger's stare annoyed him so much.

"Maybe he knows the horse, and wonders how I came to be driving it," was the next comment of Sam, as he allowed the filly to quicken her pace somewhat.

"Hello! here's the driver of this rig, I'll bet a cent. Got thrown out of the sulky, likely. But—ah! what ails the chap, anyway?"

Sam drew up rather abruptly under the spreading branches of a large elm, a great many of which shaded the long, level roadway.

There was a stone watering trough near the elm, and the horse thrust her nose into the swirling liquid with a grateful sniff while Sam alighted, and with one hand still on the bridle rein, bent over the figure which half reclined on the turf beside the tree.

The figure was that of a young man of nineteen or twenty. He was in the act of rising, or trying to rise, to a sitting posture. His costume was that of a jockey. His cap had somehow be-taken itself to the wrong extremity of his attenuated length, and he was holding it down with one dusty shoe.

"I see ye!" this individual exclaimed, peering up at Sam in anything but a friendly manner. "And I've ketched ye at your tricks," he continued.

By a great effort he got upon his feet and confronted Sam Talbot, steadying himself by resting one hand against the tree.

"Well, you're a cool one, if I do say it," retorted Sam.

He comprehended the situation in an instant. The jockey was neither ill nor hurt. He was decidedly the worse for liquor, and it was evident that he had been asleep on the turf.

Evidently he was under the impression that Sam was in the act of leading the turnout away—probably with the design of stealing it. It seemed likely that he had fallen asleep while the filly was drinking at the trough, and that he was unconscious of the lapse of time.

"This horse yours?" Sam demanded, without appearing to notice the ridiculous charge of the other.

"Guess you'll find out if you try to git away with her," was the retort.

As he spoke the jockey advanced aggressively, and was on the point of seizing the reins which Sam still held, when there was the clatter of approaching hoofs, and a horseman came suddenly upon the scene.

"Great Jinks!—it's Ragsdale!" the jockey exclaimed. And with unsteady limbs he scrambled up the grassy bank and disappeared in a thicket beyond.

CHAPTER II.

MR. RAGSDALE'S ENEMY.

"Well, sir, how's this? Where's Tripp?" exclaimed the gentleman who drew up his horse so abruptly at the watering trough, just as the intoxicated jockey disappeared over the brow of the slope.

Sam was not of the sort to have his wits paralyzed by either sudden or unexpected happenings.

"Your name Ragsdale? And this your horse and sulky?" he questioned.

The boy stood at the head of the filly, and affectionately stroked the animal's nose as he spoke.

"The outfit belongs to me—or would if they were paid for—and my name is Ragsdale," the gentleman replied, critically eyeing the trampish-looking youth who seemed to have taken possession of the turnout.

"The filly was running down the road two or three miles back here, and so I pulled her up and fetched her back," explained Sam.

"Running away, was she? And Tripp not with her?"

And something between humor and impatience twinkled in the gray eyes of the gentleman. The latter took off his derby hat

and dusted the crown as he spoke, still eying Sam, as though he were trying to make up his mind whether or not the latter were a confederate of Tripp, whom the latter may have bribed to take the brunt of his master's displeasure.

It was quite evident to Sam that Mr. Ragsdale's jockey, the aforementioned Tripp, was prone to getting into scrapes of one kind or another.

"The filly was taking a trip of her own choosing, and leaving the other Tripp to sleep it off, as it were," Sam replied, shrewdly making the most of the possibilities of a pun on the jockey's name.

"I see—and so my plans seem to be in a fair way of getting badly tripped all around," said Ragsdale.

The gentleman dismounted and flung his rein to Sam, while he examined the legs of the filly to see if she had done herself any mischief. He evidently found everything satisfactory.

"Tripp is a hard ticket at times, and worth his weight in gold at others," he said, again fixing his keen eyes upon Sam. "He has won two or three hard races for me, and he has likewise kept me awake at nights for fear that he would turn up good for nothing just when I needed him most. Didn't I catch a glimpse of the rascal running up the bank yonder as I came up?"

Sam briefly recounted what had passed between himself and the young man he had discovered asleep beside the watering trough. And he added in conclusion:

"I was just figuring whether to give the rig over to him or hold onto my find till I found the owner. I'm glad you came up just as you did, for I hated to have anything happen to the mare. Ain't she a beauty, though? And she seemed to know what it was to have somebody on her back, and to rather like it."

Mr. Ragsdale surveyed the youth from head to foot before replying. Sam had a bright, open countenance, and eyes that were not afraid to meet a glance squarely.

Still, his dusty, badly-worn clothes made him look too much like a tramp to please fastidious eyes.

"You like horses?" the gentleman suggested.

"I love 'em!—that is, good ones. I don't go any great on the sort they wear out on horse cars and public hacks. And I never was much stuck on following one with a plow or a stone-drag. But that filly is a daisy, and she would have some speed in her, unhitch her from the sulky. She's no business to be kept down to a trot, though!"

Sam spoke as though there were no one to listen—rather as though he were talking to the horse herself. Mr. Ragsdale's eyes twinkled.

"Ever ride at a race?" he asked.

"Not at a regular one. A jockey got me to help him train a wild young beast last summer, but he served a mean trick before the race come off, and I got out of it."

"What is your weight—that is, with some of the dust shaken off you, and your hair cut?"

"Hundred and sixteen, when I've been having my rations regular. Hardly up to that to-day. I've lived on wind and pump-water for the last three days, and that isn't so good for putting meat on a fellow's ribs as some things."

"I should say not. According to what you say, you have been tramping it lately."

"That's the plain truth of it," Sam replied.

Ragsdale evidently knew something about boy nature; perhaps because he had been a boy himself at no remote date.

"Didn't like the last place where you worked, eh?" the gentleman shrewdly suggested.

"No great love lost between old Caswell and me," Sam retorted, a flash of resentment in his eyes.

"You know the races open at the park here next week? And that there never was anything here on the same scale before. Jump onto Dandy, there, and I'll keep alongside in the sulky. Perhaps I can make use of you. If I do, I won't squeal when you ask me for your pay. Had your breakfast?"

Sam did not answer until he was in the saddle of the sleek animal which Ragsdale had dismounted.

The latter entered the sulky, gave a parting scrutiny to the clump of bushes where Tripp had vanished, and set the pace at a brisk walk along the shady road.

Sam ached to see what the animal under him could do, but seeing that the other had something to say, he curbed the impulse.

"I had a pretty slim breakfast," he declared in response to the gentleman's last question.

"Slim, but not very tall, eh?" suggested Ragsdale.

"That describes it, sir. But the little ride I had on that filly of yours was pretty pear as good as a square meal!"

The ride that followed, although not long in the matter of distance covered, nevertheless took considerable time for its accomplishment, and it ended by Mr. Ragsdale taking Sam into a restaurant on busy Main Street in the city which had been the youth's destination.

And there justice was done to a liberal "spread," and afterward they proceeded out of the city by another street, arriving at last at the door of a small, neat private stable, which the owner had been obliged to give up the use of on account of ill health.

A cosy cottage stood at a little distance from the barn, and here Ragsdale had secured lodgings, that he might be near his horses both night and day.

As Sam dismounted and his new friend alighted in front of the stable, both noticed that the door was wide open, and upon the neat floor just within the building there lay a battered hat and shreds of torn clothing, with other signs of a scuffle.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Ragsdale. And his cheeks paled with mingled anger and alarm.

He rushed into the stable as he spoke, leaving the filly to the care of Sam. The latter followed, leading both horses.

At the same moment a man staggered forth from a vacant stall. A glance showed that the shreds of tattered clothing and battered hat were his, for his head was bare, and his blue flannel shirt was nearly torn from his back.

This was not all. The man's face bore several bruises, while he seemed so weak that it was with difficulty that he could stand erect.

"I—I got rid of 'em, boss, anyhow," this individual managed to articulate, in response to the inquiring look of Mr. Ragsdale. He finished by ejecting blood from his mouth, at the same time showing that he had lost one or two teeth in his recent encounter.

"What do you mean, Jack?" Ragsdale demanded. "Who have you been fighting with? Somebody been trying to run off one of my horses?"

Jack Gardner drew one tattered sleeve across his lips before replying.

"He didn't git so fur as that," he replied. "But I reckon he meant mean kind of mischief of some sort. Ketched him hidin' behind a bale of hay up in the loft. He pounced onto me like a derved catamount, and we clinched. Then he run down here, but I got ahead of him, and afore he could git away we clinched ag'in. Ughest customer I ever tackled!"

"And he got away from you, after all?" Ragsdale asked.

"Yas, he got away."

"And you were too badly used up to give chase?"

"Ugliest customer I ever tackled," reiterated the hostler, with a sheepish grin.

"But you saw the man's face?"

"I saw the man's face, boss. And it was the same chap that we see prowlin' 'round two or three days ago."

Ragsdale's face was white with an emotion which was stronger than fear, as he suddenly faced about and spoke to Sam.

CHAPTER III.

A SUDDEN DROP.

"This thing has got to be looked into!" exclaimed Mr. Ragsdale, looking at Sam Talbot, although his manner proclaimed that he was speaking more to himself than to anybody else.

"Somebody down on you? Trying to square an old grudge?" Sam returned, not knowing what else to say, but feeling that some reply was required of him.

"There may be a grudge, or there may not—it doesn't concern you, in either case," was the unexpected retort. And Mr. Ragsdale looked savage for an instant.

Then, as though recollecting that he was making a foolish show of temper toward one who had, at all events, done him a good turn, he suddenly added, in a pleasanter tone:

"I'm out of sorts, and you mustn't mind. Here is my groom used up just when I need him most, and I don't know whom to trust in his place. I had something else in mind for you to do, but I'm going to ask you to stand guard here for a few hours while I take Jack to a doctor and have his mouth mended. There isn't much for you to do. I will send a man to do the work, and you will only keep a lookout for my interest till I return. Are you willing?"

Sam readily assented. And he refrained from asking any questions, although he was intensely eager to learn more of the trouble which had subjected Jack Gardner to such rough usage.

Sam presently found himself alone in the small but neat stable, and he soon forgot everything else in his interest in the fine horses quartered there.

There were half a dozen in all, counting those with which Ragsdale and himself had just returned, and one of which was now gone with the owner and the groom to the city.

Four new horses, finely-bred, and such sleek, clean bodies and limbs, which Sam could not refrain from stroking with a hand that delighted in the firm tissues and quivering nerves which, to him, would have distinguished each one from the common order of horseflesh, which is either hard or flabby to the touch.

The stall he visited last contained the most attractive animal—to Sam—of all.

A young mare of perfect proportions, a light chestnut in color, with several peculiar tan-colored spots about the forelegs and shoulders which would have identified the animal among a thousand.

But it was not the color or marking that excited Sam's chief interest.

As he approached the stall the mare sent out her heels with a suddenness that would have ended our hero's career then and there had his head been six inches nearer at the instant.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, recoiling out of range.

But he was not to be daunted by this unfriendly beginning of their acquaintance. Now that he knew what to expect, he soon found a way to enter the stall, and there to more familiarly inspect the animal whose disposition seemed to be so fiery.

The mare took kindly enough to his pattings and pleasant words, though all the while there was an expression in her eyes which warned Sam to be on his guard.

The more the youth looked at her the more interested he became. There was something a trifle forbidding in the look which the mare bent on him, and that rendered him all the more anxious to find out what sort of stuff she was made of.

"She's one of the wild sort, I'll bet a cent," was the mental comment of Sam, as he charily loosened her halter and led her out of the stall.

She was gentle enough in permitting him to put on bridle and saddle. Indeed, there was such a marked display of acquiescence on her part that Sam's suspicions were excited yet more than they would have been had she obstinately resisted the harnessing process.

"Think you'll fool me into letting you get another clip at my brain-pan with your heels, eh, my beauty?" Sam suggested, as he stood for a moment regarding the now docile-appearing brute. "But I think you'll have to reach pretty high with your heels, and get there pretty often, if you expect to spoil my good looks in that way. Mr. Ragsdale left me in full charge, and he didn't say that he had a nag that would kick my brains out the first chance she got. And he didn't say I was to keep off the back of any particular good-looking, wild ginger-snap of a horse that I happened to find in his stable."

Sam mounted, a little cautiously, as he thus addressed this "wild" specimen of equine beauty. He was gently borne forth from the stable, and began to suspect that the animal's only trick was that of kicking, after all.

But a moment after his original suspicions were verified in the most sudden and unexpected manner.

As though she had been stung by a wasp, the mare made a wild leap down the level road, plunging and throwing out her saucy heels as a colt will do when first let loose in an open field.

Then followed a series of the most violent and ingenious attempts to throw her rider that a spirited and untamable horse can devise. Plunging, rearing, wheeling, running, stopping, all in such rapid succession that the rider knew not which maneuver to look out and prepare for next.

A wild horse, indeed. And did she succeed in her attempts to rid herself of the agile figure upon her back?

Not at all.

By degrees, she felt the bit drawn by hands which were not weak or wavering. When she was disposed to go at a steadier pace Sam compelled her to keep on at the mad speed which she had chosen to display. And thus, when she was at last driven back to the stable, which they had hardly left out of sight, the beautiful animal was panting from exhaustion and as mild-tempered as a spaniel dog.

"Maybe you'd like to try that fun again one of these days—eh, my girl?" exclaimed Sam, as he rubbed down the moist, quivering limbs of the wild-tempered brute.

But a glance into the mare's eyes told a different story. She had found a master, and acknowledged his power by a manner that was as caressing and submissive as it had before been defiant.

The mare again in her stall, Sam was on the point of looking out for some new sensation when he was startled by the sound of voices just outside the stable.

The voices were gruff, and the speakers appeared to be approaching.

"That isn't Mr. Ragsdale, so soon!" Sam exclaimed, half aloud. He saw two shadows fall across the clean floor of the stable, and there pause, as though the speakers were taking an observation before entering.

Sam quickly opened a narrow door, and noiselessly closing it again, darted up the stairs leading to the stable loft.

Before doing so he noticed that there was a fixed ladder also leading to the loft at the other end of the building.

The stable was divided through the middle by an open space of sufficient width to admit ordinary vehicles, with a row of stalls on either side. Over the stalls were scaffolds for hay, and these two sides of the loft were connected by a narrow bridge spanning the carriage space, and about twelve feet above the floor.

Reaching the scaffold, Sam cautiously stepped out upon the bridge, whence he could command a view of the entrance just outside of which the strangers were standing.

He was in time to see them enter, peering to the right and left. One was a stoop-shouldered ruffian, the other the horsey-looking man whom Sam had met on the road a few hours before. His head was tipped to the right and his hat to the left, in the style which so disgusted the youth.

"That boy came in here, and the first thing is to find and settle him," said the stranger.

Sam, leaning over the rail, recoiled suddenly. As he did so—crack—the rail gave way—the boy pitched forward—down shot his form, alighting squarely upon the stooping shoulders of the ruffian!

CHAPTER IV.

SAM AT THE TRACK.

"Great Scott!" gasped the horsey stranger, recoiling from his companion, who had dropped like a log under the weight which had descended so unexpectedly upon his rounded shoulders.

Sam Talbot was on his feet in an instant, and confronting the one who had spoken, while the other, whose person broke the boy's fall, lay groaning on the floor.

"Forgot to say I was coming, but I am here just the same!" Sam exclaimed, coolly.

"Well, who are you, boy? And what are you doing here in my friend Ragsdale's stable?" the stranger demanded, eyeing the boy in a crafty, disagreeable way.

"Mr. Ragsdale is your friend, eh?" Sam retorted, meeting the gaze of the other squarely.

"He ought to be, if he isn't, after what I've done for him," said the stranger, significantly.

"You see," he added, while a mirthless grin caused the man's white teeth to appear, "a man that advances cash to another man, when t'other is in a pinch, deserves to be counted as a friend, though it don't always turn out that way."

Sam remembered what Ragsdale said about the runaway filly being his if she were paid for. It therefore occurred to him that this disagreeable stranger might be, after all, a money creditor to the more prepossessing sporting gentleman.

Sam was cautious. He liked Mr. Ragsdale, yet he really knew nothing about him.

"I'll go slow and watch which way the wind blows!" was his mental resolution.

Around he said:

"If you come here to see Mr. Ragsdale, you will have to call again later. He left me in charge of this stable till he came back. If you've got any message for him, I'll deliver it when he gets back."

"Gone into the city, has he?" the other asked.

"I didn't say where he had gone."

"Don't be cranky, boy. You see, I know all about my friend Ragsdale and his way of doing business. I come here to see his jockey—the slab-sided specimen called Tripp. Tripp used to ride at the track for me, and I want to strike a bargain with him."

"Tripp isn't here," Sam replied.

The round-shouldered man was upon his feet by this time, and if Sam had been at all nervous he would have shivered under the savage glare of the ruffian's eyes.

"This is my man-of-all-work, Mr. Cashin," said the horsey man, with an affable show of introducing his companion, who certainly looked like a promising candidate for State's prison. Whereat "Mr. Cashin" ducked his bullet head in acknowledgment and looked more ugly than before.

"And I," continued the speaker, still more affably, "am Mr. Bamford Brayles, of the Coney Island Jockey Club. I run horses at the tracks."

Sam was not so much impressed by this announcement as Mr. Bamford Brayles evidently expected him to be.

The truth was, the boy divined beforehand that the stranger was a frequenter of the racecourses, and so much of his declaration therefore was no surprise to him.

"And as for his being a member of the Coney Island Jockey Club," Sam mentally observed, "I'll bet a cent that he owns just about as much stock in the Coney Island track as I do. But I won't let on that I see through his yarn. I can see that he wants to work me for some sort of a game on somebody, and I'll keep cool and see what he wants. There is some kind of crooked business going on, and when I find out which is the right side of the game, that's the side where I'm going to tie up."

"The Coney Island is a great track," said Sam aloud, in the way of a non-committal remark.

"Immense!" was the enthusiastic response of Mr. Bamford Brayles. "Not so much like the short tracks they make up this way for trotting horses. Still, when a man places his money right, and has a jockey that knows his business, there may be something in a handicap race even here. You said Tripp wasn't here?"

"No, he isn't here," Sam replied.

"Know where he's gone?"

"I don't know anything about him."

"All right—only I thought I would ask. And what might your name be? Seems to me I've seen you before, somewheres."

Sam could do no less than to give his name, although he refrained from mentioning their chance meeting on the road that morning.

The intruders remained about the stable a little more than half an hour, but kept a sharp lookout all the while for the return of Mr. Ragsdale. Whatever their original intentions may have been, they took their departure without making any aggressive move, and Sam was relieved to see them walk down the road and get into a buggy which they had left hidden beyond a clump of trees.

Ragsdale returned almost as soon as the visitors were out of sight, and he was accompanied by his hostler, who evidently had been to see a doctor, and, possibly, had had something stimulating in the bargain.

Mr. Ragsdale appeared to be in anything but an amiable frame of mind, and Sam's relation of what had transpired during the other's absence did not improve the gentleman's spirits.

"Sam!" he exclaimed, laying one hand impressively on the boy's shoulder, "that man is the worst enemy I have in the world. You don't know either of us; and it would take too long now for me to tell you the whole story. I'm going now to take one of my horses to the track, just for training. Tripp has run them for me every day since I have been here, and he was getting some good work out of them. What do you say to working Jilly for me this afternoon?"

Sam could scarce conceal his eagerness to comply with this suggestion. In his heart he devoutly hoped that Tripp, the regular jockey, would remain away.

"But," he silently reflected, "he wouldn't dare to risk letting me ride at the race without knowing more about me. Too much money at stake. But if I do well for him in practice it may recommend me as a jockey for somebody else. A fellow can't expect to tumble into good luck the first throw."

Aloud he said:

"I'll do the best I can, Mr. Ragsdale, if Tripp don't come around this afternoon. But I guess he'll turn up again before long, and when he does I'll be one jockey too many."

To this remark Mr. Ragsdale vouchsafed no reply. Whenever Sam's gaze was averted the gentleman scrutinized him keenly, as though he wished to study the youth's face unobserved.

The distance to the track was not great; and Sam rode thither with Ragsdale in the sulky. The hostler followed with Jilly, the youngest and fleetest mare in the stable.

This animal Sam had noticed particularly in her stall, and his eye told him that she was of no ordinary value.

And now, as she was led along the road toward the track, he glanced back at her frequently.

At the track were the usual scenes which transpire upon the days immediately preceding the races.

Jockeys, in their caps of various hues, were plentiful enough; and owners of horseflesh, and the sporting gentry in general, were talking and smoking in groups. Two or three jockeys were trying to make a start with horses that nobody in particular seemed to have an interest in. And there were a few gentlemen in silk hats who seemed to be thinking more of making equine purchases than of taking a direct part in the coming race.

Neither Bamford Brayles nor his ruffianly companion were at the track; and Sam was not a little relieved when Mr. Ragsdale told him to "work" Jilly around the track, just to see what she could do.

Sam had good luck as well as skill in the management of the filly. There was not a soul at the track whom he knew, except his employer, therefore he felt no embarrassment.

Sam rode well at the trial on the track; and Jilly seemed to think that a heavy wager was pending on her speed.

When Sam sprang from her back and turned the quivering animal over to the hostler, Mr. Ragsdale seized Sam by the shoulders and hurriedly drew him aside.

"You worked her to a charm!" he exclaimed, when they were alone. "And if she does as well when the real work comes it will be all I will ask of Jilly. But you must mind and not make them do better at the trial than they can follow at the race. She has been under the training of Tripp, and he knows how to handle her. If he only could work my bay colt—Wildfire, as I have named her—I would put both of them into the race. But—"

"What ails Wildfire?" Sam asked, for he had said nothing to the other about his experience with the "wild" horse, which has been detailed to the reader in the preceding chapter.

"I have never yet seen but one man who could ride her."

"How is that?"

"She was broken to saddle by a wild young rascal who sold her to me. I'm no rider myself, and this fellow showed the colt off for my benefit at a great rate, and I thought I was getting the animal for a song. Well, that colt nearly broke Tripp's head for him the first time he tried to mount. To make a long story short—I have had three jockeys and trainers on Wildfire's back, and every mother's son of them was fired over the beast's head before he had ridden her a furlong."

Sam could ill conceal his eagerness as he replied:

"I was on Wildfire's back for half an hour to-day, while you left me at the stable, and she didn't fire me over her head. She tried a few antics, but—"

"You rode that colt? And she didn't throw you?" Ragsdale excitedly demanded.

"Nary a throw," said Sam.

"Will you prove it to me by trying the experiment again to-night?"

"I'll prove it, any time and any place."

"If you succeed in taming that animal for me," said Mr. Ragsdale, earnestly, "I'll make it worth your while."

Half an hour later they returned to the stable, and Sam could not help a feeling of intense disappointment when Talway Tripp, the recreant jockey, emerged from one of the stalls and greeted Mr. Ragsdale with a sheepish grin.

Sam did not stay to witness the "interview" which he felt confident was to ensue, but started off for a stroll.

He had barely left the stable out of sight when two men stepped forth from a roadside thicket and confronted him.

They were Cashin and Mr. Bamford Brayles!

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOTTERS IN THE WOODS.

"Just the chap we wanted to meet!" declared Mr. Bamford Brayles, laying a detaining hand on the arm of our hero.

Sam flung off the familiar hand and drew back.

"Needn't be particular about taking too close a view of me, just the same," he replied.

"Come, boy, don't be cranky!" said Brayles, persuasively. "You were at the track this afternoon with one of my friend Ragsdale's horses, and they tell me you handled her neat as could be. Wasn't that so?"

"You didn't see me there?" Sam questioned, a little surprised.

"You were seen, and noticed. And you know how to ride at the track—so much I feel sure of. And jockeys of your heft are scarce as flies in January. And yet I'll go something big that Ragsdale hasn't engaged you to ride for him at the race!"

"That's between Mr. Ragsdale and me," Sam replied.

"Of course. I ain't wanting to pry into your arrangements with my friend Ragsdale, by any means. I merely wanted to put a flea in your ear, as it were. Ragsdale is a great hand to make contracts with people that he never intends to keep, except as far as it suits his convenience. That is something which it isn't pleasant for me to say. But you are a boy, and I judge that you've got your living to get. And I'm the sort of man that stands up for a boy that is ready to work his way in the world."

Bamford Brayles had a most emotional voice, and there was something like a suspicious moisture in his eyes as he gave voice to these generous sentiments.

Perhaps Sam might have been more impressed by the speech of the suave stranger had he not at the same moment noted the tigerish cunning and ferocity which pervaded the whole countenance of Cashin.

As it were, the boy did not for a moment believe that Mr. Bamford Brayles was speaking from any noble or unselfish motive.

It was merely a question with Sam as to what malignant and treacherous scheme the other was plotting against him or his employer.

"If that's all you've got to say to me, Mr. Brayles, the sooner I march on, the better!" said Sam.

And his eyes met those of the man with a defiant flash.

Brayles saw the defiance and understood it.

He shot a sudden look at the face of his comrade; and before Sam could follow the glance to see its effect upon the other, Cashin made a tiger-like spring toward the boy jockey.

Sam would have consulted his own safety best at the moment

had he taken to his heels. But there was something in his blood that always impelled him to face an enemy, no matter how heavy the odds might be against him.

So in the present case, where agility and fleetness might have defeated the purposes of his assailant, he stubbornly faced the ruffian, and met the attack of the latter with a sturdy blow "straight from the shoulder."

The blow, dealt by the arm of a boy though it was, gave Cashin another unpleasant surprise. The ruffian staggered under it with a fierce growl like that of a wild animal, and his prominent teeth gleamed like fangs.

Sam stood his ground, feeling no fear there upon a public highway, where teams of various sorts were frequently passing.

"Take care, Mr. Cashin," said the drawling tones of Brayles. "You mustn't let your temper carry you too far, so as to be harsh with the boy. You know it isn't my way ever to be harsh."

Brayles smiled as he spoke; and to Sam's surprise Cashin slunk away and walked slouchingly down the road, with reluctant backward glances. He appeared for all the world, Sam thought, like a fierce dog whose master had called him off from his coveted prey.

"A strange sort of man, but very faithful to me!" Brayles confidentially remarked to Sam.

"I should say so," said the latter.

"And I hope he won't leave you with any prejudice against me. I was really anxious to propose something to you that would have been sure to put a pretty penny in your pocket. For that Ragsdale—but never mind! I must not presume to prejudice you. Time will tell. Good-night!"

Bamford Brayles backed away, leaving Sam standing alone, and not a little bewildered at what had passed.

In another moment Sam heard the sound of wheels, and he saw Brayles and his human hound flitting down the quiet road in a buggy, and behind a horse that struck a lively pace.

Evening was at hand. The sky was overcast, and there was a feeling in the air that portended rain.

It was too far from the city at that point for street lights, although there were occasional handsome residences and well-kept grounds in the vicinity.

Sam found himself mechanically following the wheel tracks of Bamford Brayles' buggy.

Presently he found that the vehicle had turned from the highway into a narrow track that seemed to lead into the depths of a woodland tract.

Sam hesitated only a moment.

"I'll find where that pair puts up," he resolved.

He had proceeded along the wood road but little more than a quarter of a mile before he suddenly found himself near a large barn, with trees standing all about it. And just beyond, upon the opposite side of the road, he perceived a small, unpainted house, with a light gleaming dimly from a window.

The wheel tracks turned in at the barn, the large door of which stood ajar, letting out another gleam of light, for here it had grown quite dark, so dense were the shadows from thick-foliaged trees.

From within the barn came the sound of voices.

Sam crept up to a small square window and peered cautiously in.

Bamford Brayles and Cashin were each seated upon a barrel, turned bottom up, and near them stood a third man, who bore a strong resemblance to Cashin, except that he must have been several years the latter's junior.

"We have palavered about this business as long as we can afford to," Brayles was saying, with an impatient gesture. "Ragsdale

has put every penny he can raise or borrow into the chances of the race day after to-morrow. If he wins, I lose; but against that, if he loses, I'm sure to win in more ways than one. I want to ruin Ragsdale—no matter why—and for help that will bring about that result I'm willing to pay well. Now, Burton, if your plan is as sure as you say, give us the details, then go in and win the reward."

Sam Talbot, holding his breath in the intensity of his interest, pressed his face yet closer to the opening, that he might not lose a single syllable of Burton's reply.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT AGAINST SAM'S EMPLOYER.

"There's ways enough to beat a man at a race, if ye're only middlin' sharp, and have got the nerve to kerry anything through," declared the man called Burton, peering down into the face of Bamford Brayles with a cunning leer.

"Well," drawled Brayles, "I think I have the nerve for anything that you may propose, and as for being 'middlin' sharp,' I rather think you're in a position to judge as well as anybody whether I am or not."

Burton shrugged his shoulders. It was evident that he did know whether Bamford Brayles was sharp or not.

"Ye say ye tried to buy up Tripp, Ragsdale's jockey?" Burton asked.

"I tried—yes," Brayles replied.

"And he didn't buy easy?"

"He didn't buy easy," was the echo.

"Well, of course, there are only two ways of making sure that Ragsdale's hosses lose the race. One way is to cripple the hosses in some way; t'other is to buy up or fix the jockey that is to ride for him."

"Nothing so very bright about that scheme, since I knew it before you proposed it," said Brayles.

"What you're after is somebody with a plan for carrying out the scheme," continued Burton, with a sly leer.

"That is what I'm after."

"Well, I said I had a plan, and I'll say that I'll see to carryin' of it through for a consideration. To make matters doubly sartin, I say, cripple the hosses and the jockey, too!"

"That is well; but how?"

"Accordin' to your tale, Tripp, the jockey, likes some kinds of drink better than he does any kind of food?"

"A good deal better."

"Then he can be dosed."

"Easy enough. But Ragsdale doesn't put all his dependence on Talway Tripp. He is liable to get into such shape that he couldn't ride at the race, without any dosing. So our friend has just hired another young fellow, and to-day the new one—a mere boy—worked Ragsdale's Jilly around the track for practice. And when it comes to dosing two jockeys, there is too much risk and uncertainty."

Sam, hearing this, pressed his face closer to the opening and silently shook his fist at Bamford Brayles, as a mute sign of defiance.

"Can't ye buy the new one?" Burton suggested.

"I haven't fairly tried. But we felt of him a little to-day, and found him a good deal like a bag of gunpowder. And our friend Cashin, here, tried scaring him, and got a pretty sharp clip from the youngster's fist for it. But, being only a boy, of course I don't mean to let him stand between me and what I want to do. I was merely seeing how much of a scheme you had in your

head, and if it was worth any more than the one I had mapped out in my own."

"Perhaps the youngster would come to his senses if he was given his choice betwixt money and a broken head!" leered Burton, with a sidelong slouch.

"Not much doubt of it," Brayles answered.

"Then why not try that as our first move?"

"I can manage the jockey," said Burton. "But as for the hosses——"

"Manage the jockey, then. I'll find a way to fix the horses—the ones he is to enter for the race, at least. Now for the youngster—he is your meat, Cashin."

The latter, like the fierce animal he so strongly resembled, brought his teeth together with a click.

Sam Talbot, the boy jockey, had heard enough.

With thrilling nerves he turned away from the barn window and stole silently out toward the wood road.

Evening had fallen swiftly in the woods.

Sam dared not strike a running pace while he was so close to his enemies.

He walked with long, cautious strides, glancing frequently backward at the glimmering lights in the house and barn.

Suddenly the rumble of wheels sounded just ahead of him, and he realized that a vehicle of some sort was approaching the lonely dwelling.

He turned hastily in among the denser shadows by the roadside, hoping that he might thus escape observation.

As he did so, however, he saw a dark object bound along the narrow road and halt abruptly opposite his hiding place.

At the same moment the long, doleful bay of a hound quavered upon the air, and the animal, which had paused to sniff at the tracks of the intruder, wheeled suddenly and leaped toward Sam's concealment.

All these details occurred much more rapidly than we have been able to relate them. Sam knew that discovery was inevitable. He had not a doubt but the driver of the approaching team, which was accompanied by the hound, was friendly to the occupants of the lonely house.

Sam's first impulse was to escape from the teeth of the hound. To that end he did some lively climbing up the nearest tree, which chanced to be a maple sapling.

He barely got his legs out of reach of the dog as the latter leaped upward at the foot of the tree. He paused, breathless, upon one of the lowest branches just as the team stopped. And an instant after he saw a man alight and approach the dog, swinging a lantern to and fro as he came.

"I ain't caught till I come down," thought Sam.

And with this thought he began to climb higher among the thick-foliaged branches.

"Hey, there, Snipe!" exclaimed the man, as he reached the foot of the tree where the hound was still dolefully signaling. "What ye treed? Nothin' but a chipmunk, I'll warrant!"

The man squinted up into the branches, still swinging his lantern. Then Sam saw him take something from his pocket and hold it close to the light.

The object was a small pocket mirror, and the rays from the lantern were reflected full upon the figure crouching amid the foliage.

Sam strove to avoid the searchlight, but in vain.

"I see ye," said the man, coolly pocketing the glass.

"Better come down," he added, "whoever ye be! I won't let Snipe chaw ye unless ye try to be too nimble. Come, get a move on ye!"

"Suppose I rather roost up here?" Sam retorted, realizing that

he was fairly discovered, and that it were useless to pretend otherwise.

"I tell ye to come down, and lively about it. I ain't foolin', as ye'll find out if ye try to be too funny!"

Had it been merely a matter of his personal safety, Sam would not have hesitated about surrendering. But he thought of the consequences to Ragsdale if he were to fail to warn him of the plot to ruin him. And this thought made him resolve to escape if possible.

So, instead of speaking or making a move toward descending, he began to clamber out upon one of the larger branches, with the purpose of getting into another tree which grew close to that one.

"Hold on, youngster!" commanded the one below. And Sam was thrilled by the sound of an ominous click.

Glancing down he saw that the man was menacing him with a revolver!

Sam set his teeth with mute determination. With sudden agility he swung his weight from the bough that supported him, and clambered nimbly into the tree adjoining.

The sharp report of the revolver rang on the air, followed by a triumphant howl from the hound!

CHAPTER VII.

A LIVELY CHASE.

Sam Talbot felt a sharp twinge in his left ankle at the same time that he heard the pistol shot.

Sam fell into the midst of a dense thicket, and, being out of range of the lantern's rays, the dog was momentarily at a loss. The animal ran past the thicket—sniffed the air—bayed once more—then leaped directly toward the fugitive.

For the moment Sam had little hope of escaping capture, even temporarily. But the weakness that caused him to fall passed off as quickly as it came, and as he attempted to rise to his feet his hand touched a loose stone upon the ground.

He clutched the missile eagerly, and arose with it poised for a throw.

The hound was almost upon him. The man, too, was approaching at a slouching gait.

The dog made a spring toward the youth with open jaws and gleaming eyes. Sam recoiled—hurled the stone with all his strength—then, as the hound fell in the midst of the thicket, the boy sprang away through the woods at a pace such as he never struck before.

At first there were heavy footfalls in his rear, indicating that his enemy was in hot pursuit. But these became inaudible, and Sam was conscious of a sticky feeling upon his left foot, and frequent twinges of pain in the ankle which had received the shot.

"He drew blood on me, anyhow," was his reflection, as he sank upon a half-rotten log and pulled off shoe and stocking.

He struck a match, and hurriedly examined the wound.

The shot had clipped across his ankle, just above the joint, tearing off a small piece of flesh in its course.

The wound was not serious, nor was it likely long to continue painful. But it bled copiously, and Sam bandaged it with his handkerchief, replaced the stocking and shoe, and then once more arose to his feet.

Above he could see the cloudy sky, with not a star in sight. A gusty breeze whirled through the trees, and whisked dry leaves up from the ground.

"I don't seem to be getting out of the woods in this direction," Sam observed. And he tried to think of some way of getting his bearings.

"Let me see," he added, holding up one hand to let the wind blow upon it. "The wind came from the east when I started down the road two hours ago—I remember, because it was in my face all the way. If it hasn't changed since, then I have been going north all this while. That wouldn't take me out to the road in a month of Sundays. I must strike off from the path, and find my way out by keeping along close to the wood road. I wonder if I smashed that dog's skull! I haven't heard a yip from him since I flung the rock."

Having, as he believed, obtained his bearings correctly, Sam struck out at a more leisurely pace in the direction which he thought would take him to the highway.

He kept on thus, through a pathless, wooded tract, for fully an hour.

The darkness was intense, and presently it began to rain, the drops pattering down through the foliage.

Just then Sam was surprised to see a light glimmering through the trees.

"Must be there's the road, and the light comes from a house," was his thought.

He went forward cautiously, and saw that the light indeed came from a dwelling; but nothing like the well-kept highway which he was seeking was visible.

The house was a mere hovel in dimensions, and unpainted. It was like the one occupied by the accomplices of Bamford Brayles, from whose neighborhood Sam supposed he had been fleeing.

"If I've gone back to that shanty, it's a pretty go," Sam exclaimed.

He stole cautiously forth from the edge of the woods, and approached the window through which the light was shining.

The window was small, and a curtain closely drawn shut out a glimpse of the interior.

Sam reached up and drew himself to a level with the window sill, in the hope of being able to find some slight opening through which a view of the room within might be obtained.

As he did so he heard the sound of footsteps approaching, and saw a hand seize the curtain from the inner side, with the evident purpose of drawing it aside.

Sam dropped to the ground with all the noiselessness and celerity he could command.

Scarcely had he done so, and drawn himself within the denser shadow of a tree that stood close to the house, than the sash was softly raised, and he beheld something like a bundle thrust out through the opening and dropped to the ground.

Sam had not time to recover from his astonishment at this manifestation before the sash was raised still farther and the form of a girl clambered out upon the sill, and letting herself down at arm's length, hung suspended for an instant, and then dropped to the ground, so lightly that Sam would not have suspected by the sound what had happened had he not observed the act.

The girl stood erect in a listening attitude, her face turned full toward the hiding place of Sam. Then she picked up her bundle, and stole with swift, cautious footsteps toward the forest.

He stepped noiselessly forth from his concealment, and in another moment stood directly in the path of the fair, young stranger.

She recoiled, and for an instant seemed bent upon fleeing from the spot. But she saw that he was a stranger, and but little older than herself, and these facts seemed to reassure her.

By a hurried, graceful gesture she beckoned him to follow her, at the same time gliding along a forest pathway with which she seemed to be familiar.

Sam complied with her silent command, curbing his curiosity until she should bid him to speak.

They kept on thus silently for ten minutes, the girl leading the way, and occasionally pausing to listen. At the end of that period she abruptly paused, and, after listening once more, she faced him, and exclaimed, in a low, sweet voice:

"I don't believe they have discovered my flight yet, and I hope they won't until morning. If they don't, they will have a good time finding me, I can tell them that. But who are you? And why were you prowling around the house? Were you watching for me to come out?"

"One question at a time, miss," said Sam. Yet he briefly answered all three questions, adding:

"Now, I guess it would be no more than square for you to tell me who you are, and why you're running away in this style?"

"My name is Eugenie North," she declared, in a low voice. "But," she added, "the full name is too much for me to carry around for ordinary use, so you will call me Genie, if you please. Uncle Caleb Burton, who used to live in Kansas, calls me 'Norther,' because he says I am a good deal like the fearful winds they have out there sometimes."

Sam inwardly decided that this was just the style of girl he should like. There was nothing "slow" about her—so much he felt sure.

"So Burton, who lives in that old house in the woods, is your uncle, is he?" Sam asked.

"I s'pose so, though I didn't choose him. And the worst of it is he calls himself my guardian also. He has more ugliness in him than any other man I ever saw, except his cousin, Mr. Cashin, who looks enough like my uncle to be his brother. Cashin shows his teeth like a bulldog. It is from the two that I am running away, for they're plotting so much mischief, day and night, that I am really afraid of my life."

"You got out of that window pretty neat," said Sam. "And I suppose you know what place you're steering for? Got friends in the city?"

"I haven't a friend in the world," was the quick reply. "But I'm not afraid—hark! Hear that? My flight is discovered, and they will track me with their hounds! Come! we have a good start, and we must run as if it were for our lives!"

The sound of loud shouts, followed by the baying of hounds, told Sam that their peril had only just begun.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE BARN.

Silently they hurried forward, and for a time it seemed as though they were leaving their pursuers behind. But presently the baying of the hounds assumed a greater distinctness, and they realized that they were close pressed by their animal pursuers, at all events.

Genie abruptly came to a halt.

"There is no use in trying to outrun the dogs," she exclaimed.

"Then I'll find a stout club and fight 'em," suggested Sam.

"No use in that, either," the girl returned.

"What will we do, then? Let 'em gobble us up like a pair of woodchucks?"

"Not at all. The dogs will not hurt me, nor you either, if I tell them to let you alone. They set them on my track, so that they would know how to follow me in the dark—that is all. The dogs will keep their barking going, to tell them where we are. But we have still a chance to set them on a wrong scent, and so gain time. The hounds are 'most here, and I will make them keep quiet for a little while."

Sam's wits were not idle. His companion had the power to protect them both from the teeth of the hounds, since they knew her and were friendly to her. And while she was temporizing with the brutes, why might he not carry out his original intention of securing horses from the stable of Caleb Burton?

"Good!" exclaimed Genie, when he proposed the idea to her. "Make your course back to the barn now, as quickly as you can, while I deal with the hounds. As soon as they come up with me I will coax them to keep still, and they will follow me quietly back toward the barn. That will leave Uncle Caleb and Cashin all at sea in following me, and if you are spry and cautious you will have time to get out a horse for each of us, and then we will give them a fine chase before they see the light of our eyes again."

Sam soon found himself near the large stable within which he had overheard the plot to beat Mr. Ragsdale's runners at the race.

The barn seemed to be deserted, although a lantern was burning dimly near the door. The latter was shut and locked on the inner side, indicating that the one who had secured it came out by another exit, probably on the other side of the building.

The window at which Sam had played eavesdropper was still available, however, and Sam did not take the trouble to look for another entrance. If there were one it was likely to be locked, and he could not risk the breaking of a lock to gain admittance.

To climb in through the window was not a difficult task.

To select and equip two of the speediest-looking horses was brief work for his practiced hands. He found a side-saddle for his new friend, and chose for her a steed that seemed the most gentle in disposition.

Sam looked around to see that no one was on the watch outside, and then led the horses cautiously out.

Then, as he was on the very point of springing to the back of one animal, he heard a whizzing sound in his ear, and the next instant was felled to the ground by a terrific blow.

When one is wholly insensible the periods of a moment or a week seem the same upon awakening. It was so with Sam. He became conscious first of a jarring, thumping sound, which he soon understood to be the stamping of horses upon the floor of a stable, and that they were very near him.

He opened his eyes, and arose painfully to a sitting posture.

His head seemed to be cracking with pain. The dim light of a lantern swung to and fro before his dizzied vision, and he presently perceived that the lantern was held in the hand of a man.

"Well, sir!" exclaimed this person, in a voice that Sam recognized with a feeling of dismay. For the speaker was Bamford Brayles.

Sam did not respond. A glance showed him that he had been lying on a horse blanket upon the floor of a vacant stall. The door of the latter, which was of the "box" variety, was closed, and Brayles had evidently just come in to see his prisoner.

"What do you want me to do?" Sam asked, after a long silence.

"Agree to let Ragsdale and his horses alone, in the first place. Come."

"I don't make any blind trades," said Sam.

"And I'll put a hundred in cool cash in your hands, whether we make or lose on our side."

"I guess not."

"Hundred and fifty, then?"

"I'm not for sale."

"You want more money?"

"No; I'm in the employ of Mr. Ragsdale, and if you take me for the sort to sell out a friend for money, you have missed your guess. I don't belong to that species of animal."

For a moment Bamford Brayles glared at the boy in mingled

astonishment and anger. It was evident that he could not conceive of a human being who would refuse to sell his honor for money.

Then came the impulse of baffled rage.

Sam heard footsteps along the floor just outside of the closed stall. Brayles opened the door, and, without taking his eyes off his prisoner, called out:

"Cashin—that you?"

"That's me," was the reply, and the next moment the hang-dog countenance of the round-shouldered ruffian looked in.

"See that boy, Cashin? Remember the trick he's served you? Well, I give you leave to take it out of his skin! Hold on—don't kill him! Just short of that. Tie him hand and foot before you leave him. We must keep him a prisoner till after the race; and then—but we'll see how tame he is before we decide how to dispose of him finally."

Like the fierce brute which he so much resembled, Cashin flung open the door, and rushed upon our hero.

Sam knew that the brawny ruffian could overpower him single-handed; and, besides, Brayles stood by, ready to lend his aid. Yet the young jockey made a wild, fierce fight for his liberty. But the battle was a brief one. Cashin had a stout cane in his hand, and he did not scruple to use it. For a second time the boy jockey was beaten down by blows, and while he did not entirely lose consciousness as before, he found it expedient to feign that condition, for he began to fear that the infuriated ruffian would kill him ere his brutal rage was spent.

He was bound hand and foot, and then left lying upon the floor of the stall.

For what seemed to him like a long period, Sam lay in that helpless condition, his head splitting with pain. In truth, every bone in his body ached, and so thoroughly miserable was he that for the time he was indifferent alike to his own situation and the interests of his employer.

He finally arose to a sitting posture, and began to strain at his bonds. But even as he did so a startling cry fell upon his ears, followed by the tramp of heavy feet and the stamping of horses. The cries—the hurried clatter—a smudge of smoke—a glare of flame—all told Sam of a new and deadly peril.

The great barn, with its tons of hay, was on fire.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE FLAMES.

"Fire!"

The single shout, which had first given the alarm, was followed by a confusion of excited cries and commands, mingled with wild screams of terror from the horses.

Sam heard the increasing sounds of confusion. He strained madly at his bonds, rolling over and over along the floor of the stall, at the same time raising his own voice in a cry for help.

Suddenly in his evolutions his hand came into painful contact with a bit of iron, which had been driven through the floor from underneath close to the wall of the stall.

The hurt gave him an idea, however, and in another moment he was rasping his bonds against the edge of the iron, which was rusty, with a force and rapidity that soon caused them to give way.

His hands were thus freed, and it was but the work of an instant to release his ankles.

In the meantime the indications of fire became more alarming. The stall was filling with smoke and growing oppressively hot. He could distinctly hear the crackling of flames.

Hay makes quick fuel, and the fire had caught at a point where

this most combustible portion of the barn's contents was stored. Therefore it was making rapid progress.

Sam strove first to open the door. But it would not yield, and he saw that it was useless to attempt to beat it down by the sheer force of his small strength.

He next turned his attention to the small window. But he could not squeeze his body through that—of this he was sure without trying. But he at the same time espied the opening over the crib through which feed was thrown from above. And in a moment he was clambering upward through this opening, with a dense cloud of smoke surging down into his eyes.

Once upon the loft floor above, he found that he would have to pass through the densest smoke, with here and there a tongue of lurid flame, to get down to the open floor of the big barn. And even there, he was not sure that he could get out, since he no longer heard the shouts of men below.

Half blinded by smoke and stifled by heat, he nevertheless saw a window on the same level with the loft to which he had gained ascent. He dashed toward it—sent his feet crashing through sash and glass—and then with a refreshing draught of cool morning air in his face, he leaped outward through the opening without once looking to see where he was likely to alight. He struck in a wet, miry spot, into which he sank nearly to the tops of his shoes.

He sprang to his feet, extricated himself from the slough, and darted away from the burning building as fast as his feet would carry him, until he reached the shelter of the woods.

Here he paused to look back.

Morning had broke, yet it was not quite light in that gloomy place. The flames were leaping upward from the roof and one side of the great barn throwing a lurid glow over the scene.

He saw Brayles and Cashin hurrying away from the fire, each with a horse, the heads of the animals blanketed to keep them from rushing back into the flames, as they would have been certain otherwise to do. At the same time Sam heard a nervous whinny from a point near at hand, and he saw one of the horses, also blinded, and tethered securely to a tree, fully two hundred yards from the fire. With a leap of heart, Sam recognized the animal as the one which he had saddled for his own use just before his detection by Bamford Brayles. The horse had on neither saddle nor bridle. Yet Sam did not hesitate.

Vaulting upon the back of the horse, which was a speedy and nervous animal, he was soon careering swiftly along the wood road, toward the highway that led to the city.

Sam had no trouble guiding the horse, and in a short time he emerged upon the open highway. Just as he did so some one stepped from the roadside and looked up at him with a pretty, smiling face.

"So you got away, Sam?"

It was Genie North. The storm had cleared, and the morning sunlight brightened her shimmering hair and pretty but tired-looking face.

"Whew!" whistled Sam. "But I guess you got tired of waiting for me to come back to you with a horse? You see—"

"Brayles caught you—I understood," she interrupted.

"And so you came on along?"

"I didn't hurry. Uncle Caleb and the hired man got tired of trying to track me after the dogs kept still, and it was easy for me to wait around to see if you wouldn't come back. I didn't think they would be able to keep you a great while. Yet I didn't suppose—"

She interrupted herself, and glanced back toward the column of smoke, which they could see from that point mounting sky-

ward from the burning barn, and as she looked she shrugged her shoulders.

They were walking briskly along the pleasant road.

The latter led to a suburb, and workmen were laying the track of a new electric railway. The poles and wires were already up, and they paused to see a trolley car come buzzing along with a gang of workmen and a few early passengers.

The car stopped, those aboard got off, and the conductor walked out leisurely to observe how the work was progressing. The motorman also got off, lighted his pipe, and seated himself under the shade of a tree to wait for orders to return to the city, which would not come for twenty minutes.

Sam idly noted all these details, not thinking that events were shaping themselves for the most thrilling adventure into which his headlong spirits had ever plunged him.

While he stood with Genie beside the idle car, of which the trolley had been reversed for the return trip, he became conscious of the thunder of approaching hoofs.

Sam and Genie looked together—and their faces paled.

Two horsemen were coming—and they were Bamford Brayles and Caleb Burton. A triumphant shout came from the latter.

Sam saw the terror of his companion—he thought of his own mission—and then he acted upon an audacious impulse.

"They'll take me back!—they'll take me back!" cried Genie, clinging to the arm of her companion.

"They'd hardly dare to try taking me," said Sam, breathlessly. "And yet, if that Brayles gets his hands onto me he would try to make out a pretext for hanging on. And I can't stop now for any uncertainties—too much is depending! Come—quick—we'll try if lightning won't beat Brayles' horses in a race!"

Sam seized Genie by the arm, and, without thinking what he meant to do, she let him put her onto the car.

Then, at a bound, Sam leaped upon the front platform, seized the motor crank with one hand and the brake with the other.

A glance at the motorman serenely smoking by the roadside, and the conductor yet farther away, and then backward at the enemy who were advancing at a keen gallop, shouting and gesticulating as they came—and then a turn of the crank that let on the current.

The car started smoothly, then, as more power was let on, its speed was increased with a jerk and a buzz that sent a feeling of reckless exhilaration through the brain of the boy.

The sound aroused the motorman; several workmen simultaneously saw the car moving swiftly off. A chorus of shouts filled the air—there was a mad rush to overtake Sam and the car—a thunder of pursuit from the horsemen.

CHAPTER X.

INTO SAFETY.

It was not the first time that Sam Talbot, the boy jockey, had controlled the power of an electric car.

Now that he had inaugurated the audacious attempt at escape for his companion and himself, he felt that he must succeed at all hazards.

"I might as well be killed for a goat as a kid, now I'm in it," was his mental observation. And, with steady hand and grimly-shut teeth, he let on more and more of the current until the car seemed to fairly fly along the rails.

A backward glance showed him that the men who had attempted to leap aboard were already left hopelessly in the rear. He could hear their shouts above the rumble of the car, and the conductor and motorman were fairly dancing up and down with excitement.

The horsemen were still coming, and they evidently comprehended what had taken place, for they were urging their steeds to their best speed.

But it was plain that the horses were not the speedy racers of Bamford Brayles.

At first they gained slightly on the car. But Sam felt the limitless power under his right hand, and now he was in the race, there was all the better sport in finding what the invisible power of electricity could do against horses.

Genie sat with clasped hands and flushed cheeks, looking from the determined face of the youth to the pursuing horsemen and wildly-gesticulating employees of the road.

This street led directly into the city. From it a side street extended a little farther on, and it was upon the latter road that Ragsdale's stable was situated. Therefore Sam intended to continue the flight only to the junction of the two roads.

There was a curve around which they presently swung, and as the road was lined at that point by large trees, they could no longer be seen by their pursuers.

Already they were close to the point where Sam intended to stop, and, as they were going at a reckless rate, the boy shut off the power and allowed the momentum of the car to carry them the balance of the distance.

As soon as the buzzing and rumble subsided so that she could make herself heard, Genie exclaimed:

"This—this is an awful bold thing to do. You will surely be arrested—we both will—and put in prison, for all that I know."

Sam set up the brake before answering. Then he jumped off and helped his companion to alight.

"If we go to prison, that will be merely another sort of an adventure, and that's what I'm after," he coolly declared.

"Come," he added, pointing into the side street. "This is where we switch off. I'm sorry they haven't got the trolley wires and track laid this way, so that I could take you straight to my friend's ranch, but I'll have to ask you to excuse me this time. I have an idea that those fellows following us on horseback will do what they can to keep us from being arrested. But I may be mistaken."

"Brayles and Uncle Caleb? Keep us from being arrested by the officers of the street railway?"

Genie spoke incredulously. In truth, she was more afraid of her uncle and the sleek, treacherous, horsey man than of the authorities whom Sam had so audaciously defied.

"You see if Bamford Brayles doesn't figure it so that the railway company won't prosecute," said Sam.

"How will he do that?"

"I don't know how—only Brayles seems to have plenty of money, and money will keep a fellow out of a good many kinds of difficulty, if it's only spent right."

"I know—but why should he interfere to save you from arrest, when you say he has the best reasons for wishing to get you into trouble?"

"Because, if I was arrested he would have to appear against me in the court, and it would come out why I was running away from him. And about the time I told the authorities all I know about him and his schemes, you would see him in a fine pickle. No, ma'am—Bamford Brayles don't want to do business through the criminal courts. That's just the kind of a picnic he isn't hungry for."

"And so you think he will try to prevent them from having you arrested for running away with the car?"

"That was what occurred to me the minute I thought of the scheme. There was risk in it—but we have got here all the same."

The stable was just ahead. Sam saw Mr. Ragsdale and Jack Gardner talking earnestly outside.

The boy's heart beat faster as he thought of the possible results of his adventure. He had discovered the plot against his employer, and now it remained to be seen whether his warning should prove sufficient to prevent the execution of the scheme.

"You said you had no friends?" he hurriedly asked of his companion, pausing a moment under the shade of a big elm near the cottage.

"Not a friend in the world," she answered for the second time.

"Then what are your plans, after getting away from Burton?"

"I know how to work. I can find plenty to do in the city, and I think I can live without being the drudge I have been all my life."

"Then you had no particular thing in mind for to-day?"

"Nothing."

"Well, while the races last, and Mr. Ragsdale stays here, you might stop at this cottage, and, if I have good luck, I'll lodge here, too, unless they lock me up at the police station for running away with the car. They're nice people here, and I guess they'll put you up for a day or two till you make up your mind what to do. Then, if Caleb Burton tries to take you back, I'll try if my influence with Brayles won't induce him to let you alone for a while. You see, I'm counting big guns on the grip I hold on Bamford Brayles."

"If they will let me stay here, I will be only too glad to have somebody near who can stand up for me," said Genie.

Sam knocked at the door of the cottage, and upon a hasty pretext gained temporary admittance for his companion.

A minute later he confronted Mr. Ragsdale.

"I came as soon as I could," he began.

"I dare say. Indeed, you came rather sooner than you could respectably. Come, you're not wanted here. I have as many bums on hand as I care to look after."

Sam's face flushed with anger. It was plain that Ragsdale thought he had been drunk.

"You won't give me a chance to explain," he exclaimed. "And I have been working for you all the while, and got nearly killed for it. I have been spying upon Bamford Brayles, and overheard a plot to ruin you at the race."

Sam's rapid, earnest speech impressed the other. Ragsdale was in an irritable mood, and with good reason; yet he had been unwilling to believe that the boy to whom he had taken such a strong and sudden fancy was even more faithless than Talway Tripp.

"You have been spying upon Bamford Brayles?" he repeated.

In another moment the man laid a hand soothingly on the shoulder of our hero.

"Forgive me," he said, kindly. "I had no business to jump at a conclusion in that way. But Tripp has gone off again this morning, and, when you failed to appear, I about made up my mind that a decent jockey didn't live. Come—you look half dead! Had any breakfast? Come in, and let me help pull the kinks out of you. Then eat—then tell me your story."

The words carried all of Sam's momentary resentment before them. He went into the cottage with Ragsdale, and in response to orders from the latter the boy was given a chance to clean up and refresh himself by a bath. Then he sat down with Genie to an appetizing breakfast, while he told Ragsdale the story of his night's experience.

The young man asked a few questions, walking the room in great agitation.

An hour was spent in talking over his plans. He seemed to feel the deepest gratitude toward Sam for the courageous part he

had played. Yet he said nothing about engaging him to ride the race. Indeed, it appeared that he still hoped to have Talway Tripp in shape to do his part when the time should come.

Sam got two hours' sleep. Then, being once more in trim for adventure, he offered to show Ragsdale that he could ride the incorrigible bay colt, Wildfire, as he had promised to do.

The trial was made on the level stretch of road near the stable. Sam was by no means certain that the taming which he had given the colt upon his first trial would be lasting in its effects.

But Wildfire immediately showed that she considered the boy jockey to be her master and friend.

None of her wild antics shown upon the preceding trial were repeated.

She had been so difficult to manage that she had received little previous training. Yet Sam speedily proved that the "wild" horse could make superior time. And Mr. Ragsdale, delighted with the success, decided that Wildfire should be worked a trial trip on the track that afternoon.

And, it she showed up as she seemed capable of doing, she should be entered for the race.

Tripp was on hand in the afternoon, and, to the disappointment of Sam, the recreant jockey was told to work Jilly at the trial.

Tripp was out of money, and so, perforce, was sober. And, being financially "broke," he was more than usually anxious to ride at the race. He was really friendly to Ragsdale, and he was not mean enough to "sell out" to Ragsdale's enemy.

Sam, however, tried Wildfire at the track that afternoon.

A dozen jockeys were on the ground, and two arranged to start in a mock handicap with Sam. They perceived the wild mettle of the colt, and nothing would give them better sport than to get the boy jockey thrown into the dust.

But Sam was prepared. He felt that he had already made friends with Wildfire, and that he could depend upon her to do her part.

The start was made, amid a deal of noise from the other jockeys. They tried to "foul" Sam by running across his track—they jostled him in front and rear. And at last one tried to throw our hero from the saddle by suddenly putting his foot under Sam's and lifting the latter from his seat.

Sam being lighter than the lank young fellow who attempted the trick, seemed to promise to be a good subject.

But the other jockey, who was called Lanky at the track, was treated to a little surprise. Sam perceived his intention, and allowed the other to ride up close to him, although he seemed to be trying to get out of Lanky's way. They had made a start, but, owing to the trickery of the jockeys, there seemed to be little chance of any of them making a fair trial for time.

Ragsdale and Tripp were both eagerly watching Sam—the former anxious to see how the boy would cope with his rivals, and Tripp in anticipation of some fun at Sam's expense.

Sam found already that Wildfire was quickly obedient to his touch. The splendid, spirited animal seemed to have conceived something like positive liking for the boy who had been the first to conquer her moods.

Therefore the boy jockey began to trust to his power of control over the "wild" colt.

With Lanky pressing close upon him on the right, and another jockey striving to cross his course in advance, Sam's wits and muscles were strained to the utmost.

Seemingly unsuspecting he yet kept an eye upon Lanky's foot, which was drawing close to Sam's stirrup.

Then the chance came. An incoherent shout broke from the

lips of Ragsdale—a shout of warning, for he feared mischief to both the colt and its rider.

Lanky's foot came out, intending to catch Sam's underneath, and to lift the latter from the saddle.

But Sam's foot was quickest. It dropped from the stirrup, and slipped under his rival's. Simultaneously Wildfire, obedient to a tightening rein, reared back upon her haunches.

There was a shout from Lanky—then a yell from jockeys and horse owners.

CHAPTER XI.

SAM AS A JOCKEY.

It was a triumph for Sam Talbot.

His own alertness, with his firm seat in the saddle, combined with a happy control of the wild-natured colt, brought the jockey who attempted to unseat him to grief in a most unexpected manner.

Sam's foot caught that of his enemy fairly underneath. Lanky was heavier than our hero, and it would not have been easy for the latter to have lifted him by a sheer effort of his leg. But it was here that the obedience of the colt was made to count.

The spirited animal seemed to know just what was wanted of her. The sudden rising upon her haunches was in the nick of time, and supplemented the effort of her rider perfectly.

Lanky was lifted from his seat, a yell of chagrin broke from his lips, his arms waved wildly in the air, then he was sent sprawling in the dust, while his horse careered away on the course at a furious pace.

It was then that cheers and laughter broke forth from the bystanders, the witnessing jockeys joining in with a zest that showed a good-natured acquiescence in the discomfiture of their comrade.

Sam stuck to his seat. He saw that his victim was able to scramble to his feet, and then sped away around the course at a rollicking pace.

He put Wildfire twice around the track, and so even and swift was her running that there was a murmur of applause at the finish, and an eager knot of horse owners gathered about the colt and her rider with approving nods and glances.

Sam dismounted and turned Wildfire over to Jack Gardner, who was waiting to take Ragsdale's horse back to the stable.

"That was well done—very well done!" exclaimed Mr. Ragsdale, a flush and excitement on his cheeks.

"Don't she kick up the dust as pretty as any of them, though?" Sam enthusiastically returned.

"Yes, yes! And it is money in my pocket, too. I can see half a dozen would-be buyers of that wild little animal right here on the ground. You see, the colt seems to know just what to do, and that is worth as much as speed in this kind of a race. She has had better training than I thought. That isn't all; you seem to know how to handle her to a dot. You would never let them put you in a pocket with that beast!"

"That lank specimen couldn't do it, anyhow," said Sam.

"I thought he would throw you sure. You heard me whistle? I meant to warn you, but I didn't need to worry. It was well done—only I'm sorry it had to happen before the race. That jockey will pay you off if it is a possible thing, and it'll be bad to have it happen when everything is at stake!"

Sam looked quickly at his employer.

"Tripp rides at the race, I suppose?" he exclaimed.

"Tripp rides Jilly. But I shall enter Wildfire—that is——" And Ragsdale chewed his mustache meditatively.

Sam waited. He glanced over to where Tripp had been stand-

ing a moment before, in the midst of a group of jockeys. But the eccentric fellow had disappeared.

"You say you never rode a regular race, with big money at stake?" Ragsdale abruptly asked, lowering his voice.

"I never rode a regular race," Sam admitted, reluctantly.

"Yet I believe you could do it with Wildfire. What do you say?"

"I wouldn't be afraid to try."

"But you would have to keep cool—very cool! And let me tell you, the outcome is a serious matter to me. To lose would be my ruin!"

"You have a good deal of money in it?"

"You don't understand, Sam. It is my secret; that is what makes me so anxious. I may tell you about it some time—and I may not. Yet I have a mind to put Wildfire onto the track and let you ride her for me. You can work her another trial trip tomorrow morning before the trotting begins. You at least won't go and get intoxicated."

"With nothing but joy at winning," smiled Sam.

His heart beat fast with anticipation.

"Another thing, Sam. You know I have an enemy—that Brayles. He has tried to beat me through you already, and the reason I trust you on such short acquaintance is because you have stood by me to such good purpose in the affair with him."

"I don't see how he can beat you now, if Tripp does his part and I do mine."

"There are a great many ways in which an unscrupulous scoundrel may win in an underhanded game. As you know, there is nothing too desperate for him to attempt, rather than to see me succeed."

"Why don't you get rid of him?" Sam asked, his interest in the mystery enshrouding his eccentric employer growing stronger.

"Get rid of him? How?"

"I suppose he has a right to get the best of you at the race by any fair means. But he has no right to do anything to injure your horses, or to force Tripp or me to desert you. You can take the law on him if he tries anything of that kind, and I overheard enough to make out a good case for you."

"No, no!" Ragsdale hurriedly exclaimed. "I can do nothing of that kind, even to save me from the worst!"

The man's great agitation puzzled Sam more than ever.

This conversation occurred in part after they had started homeward from the track.

For the first time Ragsdale remembered that Tripp was not with them as they drove up to the stable.

"He went out of sight all of a sudden while we were talking, just before we came away," said Sam.

The day upon which the incidents just recounted occurred was a Friday.

The next day was to be given up to the trotters, with a short running race at the close, the runners being owned by local gentlemen.

But the principal races would begin on the following Monday, for which day Jilly had been entered.

So a Sunday intervened.

Saturday was spent by Sam almost wholly at the track.

In the morning he worked Wildfire for a trial again, and the other jockeys discreetly kept out of his way.

It was a successful trial, and Mr. Ragsdale entered the colt for the race. Her turn would come on Tuesday.

Tripp put in an appearance once more, and exercised Jilly with his accustomed careless ability. He remained at the track until the last race had been run. He accompanied Mr. Ragsdale and Sam back to the stable, and seemed to be in such thorough earnest

that his employer's hopes of keeping him in suitable trim to ride Monday's race arose almost to a feeling of absolute confidence.

Monday morning did not find Sam asleep. Although the races did not begin till afternoon, there was enough to be done in the interval.

Mr. Ragsdale looked pale and anxious.

As the time for the test of his horses approached, it became evident that the outcome was to be a matter little short of life or death to him.

He was silent on the score of the secret fear he evidently had of Bamford Brayles and the ruin which would come if he were to lose the race. Yet he made no bones of telling Sam that to lose would be the most serious calamity that could befall him.

Tripp appeared at the stable in good season. To the intense relief of Mr. Ragsdale, he appeared to be in good trim for the work in hand.

All were at the track in the forenoon. Tripp "limbered up" Jilly in two pretty runs around the track.

It was a noisy and bustling scene. It was said that the laws against all forms of racetrack gambling would be strictly enforced. Yet the "bookmakers" were on hand, and whoever might desire a chance to win or lose his money—especially to lose—need not have sought far.

At noon Mr. Ragsdale and Sam took a hurried lunch at the track. The gentleman, as the hour of his trial approached, grew more calm and confident.

"Brayles is here," he said to Sam. "And he is going to put one filly into the race. He won some money at the trotting race Saturday, and seems to be feeling good. I think he will bide his time and let us do what we can to-day and to-morrow without trying any of his tricks."

"I hope so," Sam returned.

"And as for Tripp, he has behaved like a hero! I begin to love the fellow!" Ragsdale exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"Tripp will stand by you in this business, whatever he does in the future," Sam warmly predicted.

The excitement increased as the hour for the race drew near. Sam kept away from the other jockeys as much as possible, since he was suspicious of some possible attempt to injure him before the morrow, when his part of the affair was to be played.

The fact that Brayles seemed to be peaceably inclined did not reassure him. He remembered the prediction of Tripp, and did not intend to be caught off his guard.

Sam was standing near Mr. Ragsdale, who was conversing with other horsemen, when a boy came running into the midst of the group. He was a freckled youngster, and a younger brother of one of the jockeys.

"Where's der N'York chap?" he demanded, casting a swift glance from face to face in the group.

Ragsdale looked at him quickly.

"I'm Mr. Ragsdale; mean me?" he asked.

"You're der chap. Come dis way, will yer, and hustle!"

The boy started off, but the hand of Ragsdale fell upon his shoulder.

"What do you want?" he sternly demanded.

"Come outer der crowd and I'll tell yer. He told me not ter be partickler 'bout shoutin' der business from der judges' stand. Git a move on ye, or your part in der race'll be in der soup!"

A sudden pallor shot across the face of Mr. Ragsdale. He motioned for Sam to follow, and he hurried after the boy, who led them to the spot where Jack Gardner and two or three jockeys were bending over an object on the ground.

"He's took sick," said the boy, glibly, running ahead.

"Sick!—whom?"

"Yer jockey—Tripp, dey calls him. Guess he's goin' to 'croak, by der way he takes on! Took sudden jest as he was goin' to take der filly to der post!"

Mr. Ragsdale did not stop to hear more. With Sam he was at the side of his jockey in an instant.

Talway Tripp it was indeed, who lay groaning upon the sward.

"Foul play here!" cried Ragsdale.

His white fingers felt for the young man's pulse.

"Bring a doctor, quick! There are a dozen on the ground!" he ordered.

"What is it, Tripp?" Sam softly asked, as the eyes of the sufferer rested upon his face.

"I—I don't know—unless I was—dosed!" was the husky response.

"Dosed!" echoed Sam, springing to his feet. And the sharp eyes of the boy-jockey keenly read the expressions upon the faces of those who were looking on.

But he saw no guilty countenance there.

"Tripp said there'd be a sudden blow," said Sam.

"And it has come, when it is too late for me to stand from under," was the low response of Ragsdale.

To look at the latter one would have thought that he was suffering almost as keenly as his jockey. Yet, as the full significance of the blow came to him, he grew outwardly calmer.

Two doctors were at hand in a moment, and they agreed that the condition of the jockey was serious in the extreme.

"He may die!" was their startling verdict.

CHAPTER XII.

THE START.

"Tripp has been dosed! And it is a part of the plot to ruin me?" Mr. Ragsdale repeated again and again.

Yet, even in the face of his misfortune, the gentleman did not forget to give orders that Tripp should receive the best of treatment.

The hour for the race had come. Horses and riders were ready to go to the post. It was at this critical moment, that Sam found himself confronted by his pale-faced employer, a little apart from the crowd. Jilly pawed the turf with her dainty hoofs near them.

"Sam, this is a matter of more than money to me!" the man exclaimed.

"I suppose it is, sir," said Sam.

"You have worked Jilly once around the track. But you don't know her ways, nor she yours. Yet, if you will, I want you to ride this race. What say you?"

The man's voice shook with emotion. He gripped Sam's arm. At the same time he looked at his watch and added:

"You have ten minutes to decide and get to the post. And—see here—money is no object to me—at least, not the sum it would cost me for the best jockey in the world!"

"I'm not the best jockey in the world," Sam replied.

"It is the best jockey in the world, who will win for me in this race. I haven't said a word about pay for you—I advanced you a little money to get along with, and watched to see how you spent it. You're straight as a man need to be. I was going to give Tripp one hundred dollars to ride Jilly for me, and five hundred in cash if he made her win!"

Sam's heart gave a bound, and his eyes shone. He knew that jockeys obtained large sums for their services sometimes—he knew that a few lucky ones had received several thousand dollars for a single successful race.

There had been times when he had dreamed of obtaining some

fabulous sum in that way, the same as everybody dreams of a success in his chosen calling, which falls only to the few.

"Five hundred dollars is a slew of money!" was all Sam could find voice to respond.

"Win this race for me, Sam, and I will pay you one thousand dollars within an hour!"

Could our hero credit the evidence of his ears?

He caught his breath with excitement.

Mr. Ragsdale smiled faintly. He looked again at his watch.

"Five minutes!" he exclaimed, and shut the case of his time-piece with a snap.

"I'll ride!" Sam breathlessly exclaimed. "And," he added, through his teeth, "I'll win if I have to lift Jilly over everything on the track—horses, jockeys and starting post!"

Mr. Ragsdale caught something of the boy's enthusiasm. His pale cheeks flushed.

"Come, then," he said. "It may not be wholly a disadvantage that you undertake the race upon short notice. They found a chance to drug Tripp, and so get him out of the race, and if they knew you were to ride they would try to fix you, too. Come, Sam, take Jilly and do your best! We will beat the treachery of Bamford Brayles yet!"

With his brain in a whirl Sam hurried to join the half a dozen jockeys with their horses who were already in the paddock. Jack Gardner led up Jilly and Sam mounted.

Sam had already been provided with a suit in the colors of his employer's stable—blue and white. And with his fair face and bright eyes nothing could have been more becoming to him than the blue cap and sweater and white breeches.

The illness of Tripp was on the lips of every jockey and horse owner. A large proportion of those who heard it winked knowingly, and laughed. They thought it was only another of the jockey's ill-timed sprees.

When Sam rode up to them with Jilly he was at first hardly noticed. It had been taken for granted that Ragsdale's filly would be withdrawn from the race.

But Lanky, who, as it turned out, had all the while been secretly in the employ of Bamford Brayles, was the first to notice the presence of the jockey in blue and white.

"Ho, chicken, so it is you!" he ejaculated, with a leer.

"It isn't anybody else," Sam returned, without looking at him.

"And that is Ragsdale's filly?"

"It is Ragsdale's filly."

"Tripp on a jag, and so the gent thought he'd try the chicken, eh?" sneered Lanky, in a tone which the other jockeys could not fail to overhear.

"You'll have all you can do to look out for those long shanks of yours without worrying yourself about the chicken!" was Sam's retort.

With this utterance he resolved to pay no further heed to anything that the other might say.

He glanced keenly at the faces of the others who were to ride in the race, for he knew that he would not have an easy time of it if all were against him.

In his success with Wildfire, in which he had so neatly thrown Lanky, he knew that he had won, at least, the temporary good will of the other jockeys. But this feeling might have been offset by adverse influences since that event.

There was the usual amount of chaffing and "bluff" among them, but he could not see that any more than the expected share was aimed at him.

"Lanky is the only one that I have got to look out for in the race!" was his thought. And he was prepared to give Brayles'

jockey all he had bargained for if the latter were to make any dishonorable attempt to defeat him.

The signal to go to the post and take their positions was given. There was no more time to exchange "compliments" with the other riders.

There was a great crowd of spectators. In the incessant hum of voices the names of the favorite horses could be frequently heard. But that of Jilly was not among those which were mentioned.

This was not surprising, since Mr. Ragsdale was a stranger in that locality, and his horses wholly unknown.

Still many curious eyes were fixed upon the clean-limbed filly and her youthful rider as they came to the post. And once Sam caught the words, from somewhere in the midst of the crowd:

"The youngster in blue and white? Oh, that is the chap that takes the place of the jockey that some say was drunk, and others that he was sick. A young lad, and the filly, nobody knows anything about. A pretty animal, though!"

"They'll know more about the filly pretty soon!" was Sam's mental comment.

He was so excited that he hardly heard what the starter was saying. But a sudden hush fell upon the crowd; then the signal sounded and he saw the flag fall!

Obedient to rein and whip the racers shot away upon the track. A yell went up from the spectators. It was a good start.

Sam glanced to the right. He met the leering look of Lanky. Jilly and the lean colt of his rival were neck-and-neck.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RACE.

Away sped the racers over the damp track, the jockeys with bent backs and grimly set lips, every horse doing nobly, the thunder of their hoofs sounding above the murmur from the crowd.

Sam knew that the eyes of his employer were fixed upon him with all the intensity of a man whose fortune—perhaps whose life—hung upon the result of the race.

Sam had not expected the start to be made so successfully. It is not often that both jockeys and horses behave so correctly that the first attempt may be called a start. But the truth was, only Lanky had the disposition to play any of the racetrack tricks which are so common, and he had a plan for defeating Sam later.

The horse rode by Lanky was no untried runner. He had made a record at Coney Island; some said that a former owner had made him close to a winner.

Lanky and his horse were, indeed, the leading card to draw a crowd to this rural handicap.

Zebra—as the colt was called—seemed to know what was expected of him. Perhaps his equine ears heard of his own unique name oftenest mentioned among spectators and bettors.

For the first furlong the six racers were well "bunched," that is, no marked lead was gained by any one.

It promised to be a close race, and a good one.

But suddenly Sam realized that four of his rivals were falling behind. One or two began to trail—to lag so far in the rear that shouts of derision came from the crowd.

Then the name of Zebra went up in a thunder of applause, and our hero saw that his enemy was leading the pace. Yet a moment later "Jilly" was shouted, and he knew that she was pressing hot upon the trail of the leader.

The first quarter was run; they shot past the starter again, and once more Sam felt the intense look of his employer upon him.

"Blue and White Sam!" came to his ears in a feminine voice;

and the ears of our hero tingled and his heart swelled as he heard the title. Genie North was upon the grand stand, and she, too, was watching him with eyes that were eager to see him win.

"Win I must!" he muttered.

He bent upon the neck of the filly with murmured words of encouragement. He had used whip and spur sparingly thus far, and Jilly seemed to appreciate his forbearance. But now she must understand that there would be a penalty if she were to let the lean colt win the race.

Under his increased urging she seemed to develop a new pace. She had not been lagging at all; she merely had not been doing her level best at the start.

Sam could feel the acceleration of speed, and a moment more he found himself closing with Zebra once more.

Lanky did not look backward, yet he was keenly aware of the tremendous pace of the filly. For the first time it actually occurred to him that he really had a dangerous rival in the race.

From the first he had not spared whip or spur. The horse he was riding was really a magnificent animal, and the jockey knew how to bring out all that was in him.

There were other good horses in the race, and Lanky had at first thought little of Jilly and her rider. He knew the latter was comparatively green on the track. As for the filly, he might have feared what she could do with Tripp's hand on the rein, for there were few jockeys in the country the equal of the eccentric Tripp when the latter had a mind to do his best.

Something of this sort doubtless flitted through the mind of Lanky when he first understood that Sam was to ride Jilly.

If he could beat the latter fairly, that would be better than to resort to any trick. And, since the regular jockey was out of the race, he had not the shadow of a doubt of his ability to win.

What was his chagrin, therefore, when he became conscious of the steady and increasing pace of Ragsdale's filly.

They had been neck-and-neck at the start; but Zebra had been made to lead so soon after that Lanky had dismissed all thought of the filly and the jockey in blue and white.

Lanky knew now that in the filly and her boy rider lay his only danger of defeat.

To "foul" the latter, and so gain a temporary advantage, was easy to do, was Lanky's thought, so he did not despair of his own success, even when he saw that Sam was riding the better horse.

But a race won by such tactics better not be won at all, since the fraud is more than likely to be discovered. Therefore Lanky determined first to make sure that his own horse was doing his best.

Jilly was creeping up. In another moment colt and filly would once more be neck-and-neck.

But at this moment Lanky put whip and spur to his horse with merciless force. The animal fairly quivered under the pain, and redoubled his already noble efforts to lead.

For the moment Zebra seemed in a fair way of gaining what he had lost. But at the same time Sam increased his efforts with Jilly, and there followed for half a minute as pretty an exhibition of "nip-and-tuck" running between the two animals as was ever shown upon any track.

A cheer arose from the spectators, who were by this time fairly wild in their enthusiasm.

But Mr. Ragsdale, with pale face and compressed lips, fairly held his breath in his anxiety for the outcome.

So far he had been amazed at the splendid riding of the boy jockey.

On and on flew the horses and riders, a blended maze of colors. Some of those in the rear began to show up in a grand burst of

speed, and it began to look as if the lead might be disputed by "dark horses."

There was more than one favorite on the track. And when one of these gained a temporary lead over those in the bunch, shouts of applause shook the air.

But it became more and more plain that the race was to lie between the two leaders. The very fact that both the owner and the rider of the wonderful filly were comparatively unknown among the spectators, and even to the sporting men, now called about them more interest than would have been centered upon them otherwise.

Once more Zebra and Jilly were running side by side.

The latter was gaining.

The jockeys did not look at each other; yet Sam knew that his enemy was plotting to defeat him by foul means if he could not do so by fair.

Zebra suddenly made a forward leap, as though he had been seized by a power greater even than his own splendid sinews.

The spurt carried him ahead of Sam's filly, and the boy jockey saw the colt bearing across his track, while Lanky made a sudden show of sawing at the bit.

"A wasp!—stung!" came from between the compressed lips of Lanky, loud enough for Sam to hear.

Sam had no breath to respond.

The behavior of his rival was throwing the latter across the track, and in another moment would compel the filly either to swerve from her course or to break her pace.

It was plainly the purpose of the other to "foul" our hero, so far as he could do so without the aid of the other participants in the race.

"The wasp business is a fraud!" was the thought of Sam. At the same time he could not help but wonder what had lent the sudden impetus to the running of Zebra.

To recover his position would be impossible for Sam with the other running so close, and half a length ahead of him.

There was no time to be lost.

Zebra, under the sudden spurt of speed, had gained the lead, but it seemed to have cost the colt dearly in the force which should have been reserved until the last.

The superb animal actually faltered for a moment, and the spectators thought he would fall.

A startling suspicion at that instant crossed the mind of Sam. At the same time he took advantage of the faltering of his rival to swerve a little from the course, so as to have the road clear ahead.

This permitted several of the other racers to make a slight gain, and those who thought the race already a settled thing, uttered a shout of renewed interest.

But Sam knew that Jilly had not yet run herself out, and he now redoubled his efforts to bring out the best that was in her.

Whip and spur were used now—not cruelly—but with that exact measure which the exigency required.

And Jilly seemed suddenly to straighten her slim body, and then to shoot ahead as though she had but just left the post.

Cheers arose upon the air. The crowd was growing wild with admiration for the beautiful filly and her youthful rider about whom so little was known.

They were upon the homestretch now.

Zebra, recovering from the mysterious exhaustion, which had seemed momentarily to overcome him, was again taking his great, steady leaps that made him the only rival of the filly.

He was half a length in the rear of the latter, but was losing nothing. It seemed now to the breathless watchers that the race

would be won or lost in a final spurt at the last. The finish was to tell the story.

The critical moment was close at hand.

Zebra again began to move up, closing the gap, and his backers felt that their expectations in this superb horse were to be fulfilled, after all.

But again Blue and White Sam urged his horse. Once more Jilly was gaining. And then Zebra made another of those mysterious forward plunges, as though he were lifted by a supernatural power. The spurt brought him to the side of Jilly, neck-and-neck.

The last moment had come. The spectators saw the boy-jockey straighten his form, and a yell went up.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JOCKEY'S TRICK.

"Won!" breathed the only silent man in that wild crowd of watchers.

Mr. Ragsdale it was who uttered the exclamation. His senses seemed to reel, for at the last moment it had seemed to him that the boy jockey fairly lifted Jilly under the wire.

If the owner was nearly prostrated by the revulsion of feeling, Sam, the boy jockey, was not less impressed.

It was some time before Sam could get to his employer so that they could exchange a syllable that others might not hear.

"I am saved!" gasped Mr. Ragsdale, wringing the hands of the young jockey.

"By a close rub, though—thanks to the tricks of Brayles' jockey!" Sam returned.

"What do you mean? I thought Lanky did remarkably well, considering that I expected him to be as full of tricks as a nut is of meat," exclaimed Ragsdale.

"Didn't you watch the race?"

"I saw him try to foul you. And once I thought he would try throwing you. But on the whole—"

"You saw Zebra make that sudden plunge, as if he had been stung by a wasp?"

"Yes. And I heard somebody say she was stung."

"I think she was—but by neither bee nor wasp. For the trick was repeated just as we were at the finish, and it nearly cost us the race. If Jilly hadn't done nobly at that last instant she would have been a goner!"

Ragsdale's lips were compressed.

"Then you think there was fraud?"

"Have Lanky's trappings examined before he leaves the ground, and you'll see," said Sam.

"I'll do it!" cried Ragsdale. "And if he used dishonest means it shall be known. There's a law in this State that will come down on a man for abusing a horse. We'll see!"

In a moment Mr. Ragsdale was consulting with the judges. The fact that he was the owner of the winning horse compensated for the other fact that he was a comparative stranger to them.

They were fair men, and Ragsdale and his jockey had not been alone in noting the peculiar actions of the colt. They had thought Zebra would surely win when he made that final plunge that so nearly carried him under the wire.

They had been puzzled, too, when the colt broke so completely at last, staggering under the wire half a length behind Jilly.

The jockeys were making ready for the final process of "weighing in," and as the winner of the race, Sam was first to step upon the scales, with the trappings upon his arm. It was a severe test to his vanity to feel so many pairs of admiring eyes fixed upon him, and to hear the complimentary remarks from feminine lips.

His cheeks burned, but personal feelings did not eclipse his proud sense of having saved his employer from the disaster which a treacherous enemy would have brought upon him.

Mingled with these and other emotions was the memory that he was no longer without money or friends.

With a thousand dollars in clean money as the fruit of his work, he felt that he had won the beginning of a fortune. A jockey who could win such a race would have enough to do during the racing seasons, and he might almost name his own price.

Sam stepped from the scales. He saw Lanky in the rear of the other jockeys who were waiting to be weighed.

One of the judges, a policeman and Mr. Ragsdale were with him. He was remonstrating with them in unmistakable excitement. A boy darted away through the crowd, and presently returned with Bamford Brayles.

"What's this?" demanded the latter, addressing the policeman, but bestowing a savage leer upon Mr. Ragsdale.

"Your jockey is charged with using fraudulent means for defeating his rival in the race. You know what the rules were under which your horse was entered. If the charge against the jockey is false, he can prove it easily. That is all we ask."

Brayles repressed the angry retort which was on his lips. He turned to Lanky. The latter met his gaze. The jockey was plainly ill at ease.

"How is it, Daniel?" his employer asked.

"That kid," pointing to Sam, "knows what was the matter as well as I. It was a fair race, and I should have won it if the colt hadn't broke down at the last minute. And that kid knows why the colt broke, if he is honest enough to stand by what he knows!"

Sam was silent. As the winner he could well afford to hold his peace until questioned.

Yet he was determined that Lanky should know that he understood the trick he had played.

"I may be a kid," was the thought of Sam. "But he mustn't think I'm any greener than I look. We may ride against each other in a race at some future time, and it will be well for him to have me sized up where I belong!"

Brayles did not manifest any affection in the gaze which he now bestowed upon the boy jockey.

"You hear what my man says?" the horsey man demanded.

"I heard," Sam answered.

"Well, what caused my horse to make that plunge just before he reached the wire?"

"The same thing that made him plunge and break half a minute before that."

"Well, what was it?"

"Lanky said it was a wasp—that the colt was stung."

"Was that it?" And Brayles turned again to his jockey.

"I thought so," said Lanky. "Anyhow, there was a wasp buzzed around me the first time."

Sam looked at the judge and smiled. The latter gentleman quietly said:

"We might believe that the colt was stung once, but that the same thing happened again, just at the most critical moment, is too much to credit, even from a New York jockey."

"The word of one jockey is as good as that of another," said Brayles. "And if that boy thinks there was fraud, why, there is just as good reason for saying there was a trick on his side, too, since he won, and with a horse that nobody expected would make a showing at all. I'm well known at the best tracks in the country. But that man and the boy!—who ever heard of them?"

Policeman and judge smiled at this remark from Bamford Brayles.

"We were heard from to-day," said Sam. And the bystanders laughed.

"There are various tricks among jockeys for giving their horses a burst of speed," said the judge. "But there is only one to my knowledge that will act like the one just played by your man, Mr. Brayles. Young Talbot, here, says, that some have been caught using electricity for stimulating a horse to greater effort. What does your Daniel say to that?"

Lanky's sallow cheeks flushed and his eyes fell. He cast a hurried glance at his employer.

"If he did anything of that sort it was not by any orders of mine!" sharled Brayles.

"Then you are willing to have him examined!"

"Yes!"

Lanky uttered an imprecation and ran precipitately through the crowd, disappearing like a shadow.

It is said that when a person accused of a crime commits suicide, it is paramount to a confession of guilt. So, when one runs away rather than stand a simple test to prove his own innocence, there is likewise good reason for believing that the accused knows conviction to be inevitable.

So it was with opinion in the case of Brayles' jockey.

"It's a pretty trick if it isn't worked too strong," said Sam, to one of the judges who questioned him. "But Lanky made a bungle of it. You see, he had a small electric battery attached to his belt, out of sight. Wires ran from that down each leg to his spurs. He could touch the horse with one spur at a time and the horse would feel only the prick of the points. But let him touch with both spurs together and there you get a circuit. And the 'juice' puts the colt on his mettle in fine shape! I've heard of races being won by that trick!"

"But this one was lost. How was that?"

"Too strong a battery. A little electricity may be good, but you don't want to send a lightning bolt through him!"

"How about Wildfire to-morrow?" asked Sam of his employer, after the late race and their own success had been discussed in all its aspects.

Mr. Ragsdale had already given the boy a check for \$1,000.

"We must wait and see," said he, with a frown.

"This race has saved you from the trouble you was afraid of?"

"Yes. At least, I have now got money enough. But we have made our enemy more bitter than ever. It might be best for us to move on—for me, at least—and to lie low. He may find a way to trouble us."

The next morning found Talway Tripp better. But he was very pale, and the attending doctor declared that he had unmissably been dosed with some nauseous drug.

Sam stayed with him for an hour, and the eccentric jockey was enthusiastic over our hero's success.

"Ragsdale won't have any more use for me now," he said.

"Don't be so sure of that," Sam returned.

"You needn't think I feel bad about it. You know I expected to get the 'sack' after the race, anyway. I'll get even with Bamford Brayles for that dosing, see if I don't. And you better look out. He'll put you under the weather before he gets through, if you give him a chance."

Sam went to the track in the forenoon, although Mr. Ragsdale decided that he had better not put Wildfire on trial.

His attention was attracted at once by a seedy-looking individual who had a tough-looking nag hitched to a sulky, and was spinning around the track in a jerky, grotesque fashion, to the great amusement of boys and idlers who were on hand to observe the free show obtainable when racers are being tried before the race.

The stranger had a sulky of the latest pattern, pneumatic tired, and, what was more noticeable still, his nag seemed to have some capacity in the way of speed.

After going two or three times around the track, the stranger drew off and seemed on the point of driving away.

But Sam detained him. The boy noticed that the horse was lame in a peculiar way, of which he believed he could detect the cause. He would go at a splendid trot for a short distance, and then would "break," apparently on account of the lameness.

"This outfit for sale?" Sam asked, as he allowed his hands to glide down the slim legs of the horse, in a critical way.

The man, who had hay-colored hair and whiskers, and small, twinkling eyes, shook his head, showing his teeth in a mute grin.

"Why not?" the boy persisted.

"I'll sell the sulky. The hoss I'm bound ter knock in the head," the man replied, in strong nasal tones.

"How is that?"

"Agreed to do it. Ruther, I swore I'd knock the critter dead with an ax, and da'sent go back on my oath!"

A broader grin parted the hay-colored whiskers when this statement was spoken. Sam scented a countryman's joke of some sort.

"He isn't old—not much more than a colt, by his teeth," was Sam's comment.

"Five year, to a month," said the other.

"Broke for trotting?"

"Yas. If 'twas for plowin' or haulin' stun I'd let the critter live. But I can't abide a hoss that'll run with a plow plum over a stun wall and a hick'ry stump. Can't lick him inter a walk with anything heavier than this 'ere sulky behind him!"

"Not much of a beast for farm work if that's the case," said Sam.

"Course not. Ye see, I tuck the critter for a debt from a French Canuck. He said the hoss had trotted in two-twenty, and would better it if he wasn't lame. He said suthin' was the matter with his huffs. I 'lowed him ninety dollars for him. He hated like time to settle with me, but after it was done he declared the critter wa'n't fit for crow-meat. Said nothin' in all creation would cure his lameness, and that Old Nick couldn't make the hoss work haulin'. He swore he wouldn't haul a feather-bed down hill. I guessed I knew better. And so I swore I'd cure the critter's lameness, and make him work inside of a month, or knock him in the head with an ax. But the Frenchman was right. And I'm goin' hum to whack out the beast's brains!"

Sam's eyes glistened.

"Give you fifty dollars for him!" he exclaimed.

"Dead?" queried the other.

"No; just as he stands."

"Can't do it. Lay me right in a lie, ye see, since I swore I'd kill him."

Sam caught the rumble of wheels down the road. He saw a buggy approaching, with Bamford Brayles and a policeman in the seat.

"Let me try the beast, won't you?" he hurriedly asked. The farmer grinned, relinquished the seat and reins to the boy jockey, and the latter moved at a swift, noiseless pace up the smooth, level road.

CHAPTER XV.

SAM AND THE TOUGH-LOOKING NAG.

The farmer with the hay-colored whiskers was an eccentric and well-known citizen, who lived on a Connecticut River farm, between the two cities of Springfield and Holyoke.

His name was Leander Lovell.

He prided himself upon his oddities; he was reputed to be wealthy, and made himself prominent in all the country fairs and horse races in that part of the county.

He had recognized Sam as the plucky young rider of Jilly in the exciting race of the day before. He divined that, as the winner of a race, the boy must have been well paid, and would therefore be in a position to buy the lame horse.

"He thinks he knows all about 'em, same as I did," was the reflection of the farmer. "I han't deceived him none. If he wants the beast he can have him at a fair figger, and takes him with his eyes open. But jest now he wanted to git out of the way of the chaps comin' yonder—I see through that. That's why he was in sich a hurry to try the hoss. I han't nothin' agin' the youngster, and if my nag will help him git away from that hossy New Yorker, let 'em whizz!"

Boy and lame trotter were out of sight when Bamford Brayles and the policeman came up. Lovell was sauntering toward the park entrance, but paused as they halted beside him.

"Who was that who just drove off in your sulky, Leander?" the policeman demanded.

"Dunno what his name is. One of them jockeys," was the indifferent retort.

"The one that rode the winning horse yesterday?"

"Yas. I guess 'twas. Didn't notice particular."

"Where has he gone?"

"Dunno. Wanted to try my nag, and I told him he might drive him clean to Schodack if he wanted ter!"

"Coming right back, isn't he?"

"Tell ye I don't know. But if you're wantin' of him pretty bad, I wouldn't set my heart on his comin' around punctual, for he seen ye comin' and won't be likely to run right inter yer arms as 'twere!"

Brayles did not know the eccentric farmer, nor his importance in the community, and was on the point of launching a sharp remark at the latter, but was checked by the officer.

"You don't want to treat that chap as a hayseed," said the policeman, in an undertone.

"If you've any authority, can't you make him tell you where the boy has gone?" Brayles demanded.

"He may not know, as he says. We had better go easy, since we haven't been able to make out a very dark case against the boy. He'll come back in due time, and then we can take him in custody. But Leander Lovell isn't a man to be bulldozed!"

"I'd better drive in pursuit, hadn't I? If he turn about to return we'll meet him; if not, we can overtake him."

This was spoken loud enough for Lovell to hear.

Immediately the latter began to scrutinize the horse hitched to the buggy, particularly about the animal's shoulders.

"What're you looking at?" Brayles impatiently asked.

"Oh, jest to see if that critter had a pair o' wings tucked away anywhere, that's all!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin', only if your critter can't fly, there ain't no sense in yer tryin' to ketch that hoss of mine. A buggy with your heft inside of it an't no business chasin' a pneumatic tire, with a Canuck trotter haulin' of it, and an up-to-date youngster drivin'!"

"Better let him alone, Mr. Brayles," laughed the officer, "Leander is loaded to the muzzle, every time. We will wait a while before we take charge of the boy. Our warrant will keep, and there is no use fretting. But, about the man? You said something about giving information against Ragsdale, the owner of the winning horse yesterday. If your story is true, it is impor-

tant that we consult with the chief of police, and have the gent detained till we hear from New York."

Brayles made a savage grimace, that indicated emotions which it would not have been prudent then to express. But he turned the team around and drove back toward the city without uttering any response.

Lovell watched them out of sight, chuckling. A little later he was driving up the road in the direction taken by Sam with another team which he had stabled nearby.

At the end of two miles he met Sam with the lame colt, coming at a cautious pace back toward the park. Both halted.

"Think I had decamped with your team?" Sam asked.

"Not a bit of it! I see through it all—you wanted to git out the way of that hossy chap and the officer. Ye needn't go any further, for they've gone back to the city. Jest keep yer eyes peeled and be a little shy, and ye'll be all right. The policeman don't keer nothin' about ye, and if you run, he won't break his neck tryin' to foller."

"Do you know what sort of a charge Brayles had trumped up against me?" asked Sam.

"Don't know nothin' about it. But—say—what d'ye think of the colt? Limps wuss'n a three-legged saw-horse, don't he?"

"Pretty bad."

Sam alighted and examined the off hindfoot of the animal in a critical way, and then the nigh forefoot.

"Who shod him the last time?" Sam asked.

"Holyoke blacksmith—best one in Hampden County, too!"

"Did he think he could fix 'em so he wouldn't limp?"

"Yas. And I felt sure on't myself. That's what I thought ailed the hoss. That's where I found that the Canuck knew what he was talkin' about, while I didn't."

"Tried more than one smith?"

"Yas—three. Bossed the job myself. Land, I've shod hosses, and could do it myself as well as anybody if I had the tools. No good, though, with that critter. That's why I'm so sot on whackin' out his brains."

"You don't mean it, Mr. Lovell. You say the horse stands you ninety dollars. Now, I expect to leave these parts pretty soon, and I don't want to ride in the cars if I can go any other way. I'll give you ninety, cash, for the horse, and what you say for the sulky."

"And lay me right in a lie!" grinned Lovell.

"Your conscience will let you off easy on that score, I guess," laughed Sam.

"No it won't. I've said what I'd do, and there's no way of gettin' out on't, onless the hoss ups and dies a natural death."

A bright thought occurred to Sam. There must be some way of overcoming the ridiculous obstinacy of the farmer.

"You didn't say when you would kill the horse, did you?" Sam asked.

"I didn't set no partic'lar time."

"Then sell me the colt, and I'll give you a written agreement to return the animal to you when he becomes useless to me, or to the future owner. Then you can carry out your threat to kill the colt."

"No, that won't do. I said I wouldn't sell, and I'll be blessed if I'm goin' to. But—see here!"

Leander Lovell seemed to have thought of a loophole of escape from the pledges which he had given as to the disposition of the lame colt.

"Well, what is it?" Sam demanded.

"I reckon we can fix it, after all."

"How?"

"I'll lease ye the colt for ninety-nine years. At the end of that

period, if the critter still holds the fort, you're to return him to me, to be knocked in the head as agreed! What do you say to that?"

Sam looked at the farmer sharply, to see if he were in earnest in the ridiculous proposition.

Not a sign of humor showed through the hay-colored beard of Mr. Lovell. Sam promptly said:

"I'll take a lease of the colt, if you make the consideration low enough. Name the money."

"Ninety-nine dollars—payable in advance!"

"Do you guarantee the horse to live till the end of the term?"

"No; but I'll guarantee that he'll limp as long as he breathes. Come—what d'ye say?"

"It is a bargain. And the sooner the papers are made out, the sooner you will finger the money."

"D'ye want to drive back to Springfield?"

Sam remembered that Bamford Brayles might have planned to give him trouble if he should appear in the last-named city at this time, and so replied:

"How much further would it be to Holyoke?"

"It's about six miles from here."

"Any objection to going there?"

"Nary a bit—right on my way. In fact, I'll go ahead with this outfit and you can foller with the sulky."

Away they sped, Sam's heart swelling with new hopes as he watched the swift, swinging gait of his new acquisition.

A lawyer was found who readily understood the eccentric whim of Leander Lovell, and who drew the papers. Lovell helped the boy to get the cash on his check, the bargain was completed by the purchase of the sulky, and our hero felt like a king.

Sam made his way almost directly from the law office to a blacksmith shop. For the next two hours he was absorbed in the direction of the man who was re-shoeing the lame colt.

To claim that our hero knew better how a horse ought to be shod than horseshoers of age and experience, would be to make him out a prodigy. Blue and White Sam was nothing of the kind.

But he was in truth a lover of horses. To watch and study them had been the one passion of his life.

It had been his good fortune, for a short time, to be employed by a very famous owner and lover of horses near the city of New York.

This gentleman made a point especially of developing great trotters, and he owned some of the most famous horses in the country, some of them worth fabulous prices.

One of these had been lame, in a peculiar manner. The owner had a private shoer, who was very skillful, but in this instance he seemed to be able to do nothing for the afflicted animal.

But the owner believed that there was no obscure disease about the hoof. And, acting upon a theory of his own, he had shoes put on which were especially wrought to suit the case.

Sam witnessed the operation, and heard all that the owner said to the blacksmith. And the moment his eyes fell upon the horse which the eccentric farmer was driving around the track, he was reminded of the horse which this famous gentleman had cured of an obstinate lameness.

So it was merely Sam's intense alertness upon everything pertaining to horses and horsemanship, and a good memory for details, that enabled him now to sit beside the forge and give some very peculiar directions for the shoeing of his new piece of property.

The blacksmith undertook to do the job when he told how he wished the shoes to be made.

The colt stepped a trifle tenderly when Sam led him from the

shop—much as a boy will do with a new pair of shoes on that feel a little stiff. Still, at a slow walk, the old limp did not appear.

Sam took heart, the blacksmith stared. Again hitched to the sulky, Sam drove down the street at a cautious walk.

This pace he increased to a gentle trot after a time, and his heart thumped a tumultuous triumph as he realized that the limp was gone.

After paying the blacksmith liberally, Sam drove the horse to a nearby livery stable.

The stableman squinted at the horse as Sam drew up at the door. Then he looked at our hero and grinned.

"We're short of grain," the man said as Sam alighted. "Thought I'd mention it; so you wouldn't expect me to stuff out betwixt that animal's ribs all at one feeding!"

"That's all right," said Sam, "just give him double the ordinary feed, and that'll do this time. You might smooth up his hair a bit, too, while you're about it, while I take a little nourishment myself."

The stableman evidently recognized the horse, but he said nothing about it. Sam ate a hurried repast and returned to the stable to see that his prize received proper treatment.

Just what it were best to do next he had not decided.

He did not wish to go away until he was certain that his employer would not require his services further. He felt that he owed his success to the liberality of Mr. Ragsdale; besides, he felt a strong liking for the eccentric gentleman who seemed to have had a deal of hard experience in the world.

"I want him to see my nag before I strike out on my own account," was the boy's thought. "There isn't anybody that will be more pleased at my good luck than he, and there is no good in being lucky if you haven't any friends to care. I don't know whether it is safe for me to go back to Springfield or not, but I'm going to take the risk, and if Bamford Brayles wants to give me a picnic, I'll have a chance to show them what my nag is as a sprinter."

It was getting late in the afternoon when Sam drove away from the city of Holyoke at a leisurely pace. He had been obliged to miss seeing the second day's racing, and, under ordinary conditions, he would have felt greatly disappointed.

But his great success, with the spice of danger in his situation, made him indifferent to the sport in which he was to take no active part.

Once out upon the country road, with no one to spy upon them, Sam tried the speed of his horse for a short distance.

The animal was obedient to rein and whip, and docile as a kitten. Every sign of lameness had disappeared. And even the casual trial proved the beast to possess capabilities which filled the heart of his young owner with enthusiasm.

They came out upon the road where Ragsdale's stable was located. As they did so Sam was startled to see a crouching form crawl forth from a roadside thicket and make a peculiar signal with one uplifted hand.

Sam drew up quickly, staring down at the person. The latter straightened up and pulled away the scarf which was muffled about his head and face.

It was Mr. Ragsdale—yet how wonderfully changed.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THEY HAVE STOLEN MY HORSE."

"By all the powers!" gasped Sam, staring at the grotesque figure and haggard face of his employer.

"Keep a sharp lookout, Sam, and tell me if you see anybody

coming," the strange young man exclaimed, with a nervous glance up and down the level road.

The road seemed to be deserted. Clouds were gathering along the horizon, and there was the indication of coming rain in the air.

"What in the name of wonder has happened, Mr. Ragsdale? You look as if you had been run through the hopper of a grist-mill," said Sam, bending toward his employer, who had drawn close to the sulky, and stood leaning against a wheel.

"Not that, exactly," and a faint smile flitted across the gentleman's face. "But I've had a little trouble with Brayles' lackey—Cashin. The man is worse than a tiger! But I laid him out, and the policeman, too, and now I'm playing a game of hide-and-seek till I can bring things around in my favor. They'll arrest me if they get a chance, and once clip my wings in that way, and I can do nothing to help myself or anybody else. In other words, I want to light out from this region—I want to get across the line into Canada."

The man spoke hurriedly, yet he seemed to have a very definite purpose. To Sam it began to look very much as if Mr. Ragsdale was in reality a criminal, afraid of justice. Yet he appeared like one who is the victim of circumstances—like an innocent man, about whom a web of guilt has been woven out of the conspiracies of enemies.

Had Sam's sympathies been less responsive, or his experience greater, he might have hesitated before linking his fortunes with such a character.

But he felt that, whatever this man might have done, he had a good heart, and that he needed a friend more than anything else. And Blue and White Sam knew, by bitter experience, what it was to need a helping hand.

"You want to get to a railroad station, and to get there in a hurry?" Sam asked, eagerly.

"Not at all. I might as well walk right into a police station as to try to take the cars anywhere about here."

"Then what are you driving at? What can I do for you?"

"Are you sure, Sam, that you wish to help me at all?"

"Just as sure as I am that you have given me the first lift in the world I ever got, and that you've been the means of starting me on my way to a fortune. This is a pretty slim-looking piece, Mr. Ragsdale, and he stands me only ninety-nine dollars, but I'll see ten times that money before I part with him. But you don't want to listen to any yarns now. Tell me what to do, and see how lively I'll do it."

Ragsdale merely glanced at Sam's prize.

"I want you to go and buy for me a good, strong, fast saddle-horse—one that I can ride all day and all night, if need be. I will keep on a certain spot which I will name as a rendezvous, where you will deliver your purchase. You know a good horse when you see one, and I can trust to you to get just what I need. Will you do it?"

Sam hesitated. Not that he was unwilling to carry out the commission of his employer, but another plan occurred to him, which seemed to promise better results and fewer difficulties.

"Wait," said Sam. "We can save time by doing another way, if it will suit you as well. I will get a wagon of some sort, and let this nag take us along your way a good piece together. I don't know as I want to go to Canada, but I'm willing to go in that direction, and we can pick up what you need for a horse as we go along and not excite suspicion. What do you say?"

"I shall be pursued, and you will be in danger on my account," protested Ragsdale.

"I've had something of a fight on your account already," said Sam.

"And you don't even know but I'm just as bad as my enemies try to make me out," the other continued.

"That's your affair, not mine, unless I know it to be true."

"Is that animal sound, and equal to steady work every day for a month?"

"That's what I want to find out. He is a Canada chap himself, and will think he is going home if we drive in that direction."

"Good!—a Canada horse is the best for our purpose. And you say he can trot. Well, Sam, I would like to have you with me, but I don't want to pull you into trouble. So far as money is concerned, I will make it worth your while. We must have a heavier vehicle than that, as you say. Go straight to my stable—Jack Gardner is still there—and get my wagon. Be quiet about it—slip away easy—Jack will help you—and for goodness' sake, lose no time!"

While the man was speaking there was the rumble of wheels, and without another word Ragsdale slipped back into the thicket from which he had emerged.

Sam could hardly realize that this cringing, slinking person was his late employer. Mr. Ragsdale had ordinarily the airs of a self-reliant gentleman. Yet there he was slyly in and out of the bushes, and muffled up like a thief.

Our hero lost no time in driving to the cottage and stable which had been the headquarters of the horseman. The team which they heard coming belonged to a countryman going home from the races. The driver gave Sam only a passing glance.

The boy-jockey drew up at the stable, but found a youth of his own age instead of Jack Gardner in charge.

"Where is Mr. Ragsdale's man?" Sam demanded, after giving the stranger a searching scrutiny.

"Gone into the city," was the reply.

"When will he be back?"

"Half an hour, so he said."

"I can't wait so long as that; and we don't know each other, so we've got to make some kind of a trade," said Sam.

The other grinned.

"You're the feller that rode the winnin' hoss in the race yesterday—so I knows you," he declared.

"All right—then we needn't have any trouble." And Sam briefly stated what he had come after, without entering into any explanations.

"That's all right—Gardner told me what to do and what not to do," said the youth. And without further question he began to back out the wagon which Sam had called for.

The young jockey had not the slightest reason to suspect anything to be wrong, and as he might not have another opportunity for some time to see Genie North, he ran into the cottage, leaving the stable-boy to make the change of vehicles.

Genie met him with her face aglow with delight. He told her briefly of what he was about to do, and of his purchase of the Canadian trotter.

They talked very fast, and neither had any idea how swiftly the minutes flew.

"I have found employment in the city," the girl declared, "and so, when you come back this way, as I suppose you will some day, it will not be very hard for you to find me."

"You may count on my coming back—and maybe next time I will enter a horse of my own for the races."

"I'm sure you will win if you do!" said Genie, with her brightest smile.

As she spoke, they heard a sound outside as of approaching footsteps. Sam ran to a window, which was open, and thrust out his head.

In the act he met with one of the completest surprises of his life.

For there was some one crouching underneath the window outside, who at the same instant happened to be raising his head to peer cautiously into the room.

The consequence was that Sam's head collided with force with that of the eavesdropper.

"Jerusalem!" gasped Sam, while myriad stars danced before his vision.

An even more forcible expression came from the one outside, followed by the sound of hurriedly retreating footsteps.

The young jockey looked out again as soon as he could recover his wits. As he did so he heard a shout from the direction of the stable. Genie, in the meantime, had opened the door and ran out upon the step.

She returned with whitening cheeks.

"Quick, Sam!—somebody is driving off with your horse and sulky!" she cried.

Even as she gave the alarm the boy saw his team whirl past the house in a cloud of dust. He did not recognize the form upon the seat.

At a bound the young jockey was out of the cottage, and with a single glance after the retreating team, he ran furiously to the stable.

There stood the wagon just as the unknown youth had backed it out. The youth himself was gone.

"It is a trick!—they have stolen my horse!"

For a moment Sam was stunned by the startling discovery. Then he sprang to a stall, flung saddle and bridle onto the occupant, led the latter forth and mounted.

He had chosen Wildfire—the "wild" horse he had tamed.

Away they thundered in pursuit of the unknown thief.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HOT CHASE.

As Blue and White Sam sped past the cottage he beheld Genie North standing in the doorway.

She made a hurried signal to him with her hand, accompanying the gesture with an exclamation of which he did not catch the significance. But he soon was made to understand what she intended to convey.

As he sped down the road, he felt a slight mist upon his face. It was about to rain. It still lacked two hours to sunset, yet a grayish dusk was settling upon the landscape.

He had not proceeded a hundred yards before he saw something lying in the road a short distance ahead. He pulled up beside the object. At the same time the latter resolved itself into the form of a boy, who was in the act of struggling painfully to his feet.

"Hello—it's the young jockey, is it?" exclaimed the one upon the ground. And Sam recognized him as the boy whom he had left to hitch the horse to the wagon in Mr. Ragsdale's stable.

He was bruised and bleeding about the face, and his clothes looked as if he had been dragged in the road.

"Where is my horse—Max and the sulky? No fooling, now, unless you want me to ride over ye!"

Max was the name that had been given to the "Canuck" trotter.

It was Blue and White Sam who spoke, and so excited was he that he shook his clinched hand in the face of the prostrate youth, while the latter bewilderedly wiped the blood and dirt from his cheeks.

"Gone—that way," the other answered, with a wave of his hand down the cross-road.

"Threwed you out, did he? Good enough, for playing that kind of a trick."

"I wa'n't in it at all, I tell ye. A feller jumped in before I seen what he was up to, and whipped up. That animal scooted off like a rocket, but I made a jump and caught onto the back of the team and hung on like a lobster while we went spinning down the road. I yelled enough to scare a Chinaman so't you'd hear."

"Then it was you that shouted the alarm that brought me out of the house—and it was somebody else who has stolen Max? That begins to clear up things. And you tried to stop him?"

"Of course I did. But I might as well tried to stop a comet by ketching onto the tail! The man kept laying on the licks, and after we had got out of the barn he turned and told me to drop or he'd put some lead inter me!"

"Who was the man?" Sam asked, after a moment's reflection, during which he swiftly turned over all the recent events in his mind.

"I don't know who he was."

"What is your name? It looks as if you tried to do the right thing by me, and I'll make it right with you if you will help me get back my horse."

"My name is Steve Hooper. Jack Gardner is my uncle."

This information gave Sam a sense of relief, for it was a guarantee of the faithfulness of the youth whom he had been at first inclined to distrust.

Ragsdale's hostler was faithful as the sun, although he was far from being brilliant mentally. Sam was not thinking alone of his own horse, for if this youth had been a spy in the employ of Bamford Brayles, Mr. Ragsdale's property certainly was not safe.

"Did you ever see the man that ran off with my horse before to-day?" the boy jockey pursued.

"Yes, two or three times."

"Who was he with when you noticed him at the track yesterday?"

"With that New York horsey-looking man—Brayles, I believe they call him."

Sam compressed his lips, staring down the road which would soon be enshrouded in twilight gloom. He had no longer any doubt as to the identity of the one who had stolen his horse, and the brief description which he proceeded to draw forth from Steve Hooper only confirmed what he was almost certain of before.

The thief was the bulldog villain, the savage companion of Bamford Brayles—Cashin.

Sam mounted Wildfire, and Steve Hooper saw him again speeding down the lonely road.

For half an hour Blue and White Sam rode swiftly onward. Then he beheld the glimmer of a light ahead and slackened his pace.

Dismounting, he led the steed slowly forward until his eyes were greeted by the sight of a small house, from a window of which the light shone.

Beyond the dwelling swept the broad current of the Connecticut River, across which a barge was being propelled.

Sam Talbot stood on the bank of the river and stared at the barge and its cargo.

Despite the deepening gloom he could see that the latter consisted of two men, a horse and sulky, the latter tilted up sidewise for lack of room. The men were working a pair of oars for all they were worth, and the barge was making slow headway diagonally across the current.

"My horse, and my sulky!" exclaimed Sam.

He glanced up and down the river bank in quest of another barge. But none was in sight, nor even a rowboat.

"Here, you!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Fetch back that team! You'll get into trouble if you don't!"

The barge was not so far distant but the occupants could have heard every word. He saw one of the men falter with his oar for a moment, but he soon fell to again with increased energy.

He tethered Wildfire to a tree and knocked on the door of the dwelling. While he waited for an answer to his summons he kept glancing impatiently toward the receding barge.

The door was opened by a woman, who glared at him suspiciously.

"Do you ferry people across the river here?" Sam inquired.

He assumed an air of calmness which he did not feel.

"Hank does, when he's to hum," was the answer. And the old woman's eyes twinkled behind her spectacles, as though she coveted the fee.

"On the other side of the river is he?"

"I expect so. Can't ye wait?"

"Haven't you another barge?"

"No. One man can't paddle more'n one at a time, and it don't pay to hire."

"Is the river deep along here?"

"Deep enough to drown a dozen like you, one on top o' t'other! Ye might swim, if ye an't afeard of gittin' wet!"

And the woman showed her gums in a mirthless grin.

Sam took some money from a pocket and held it up for her to see.

"I've got a long journey to take alone," he said, "and I want to buy something to replace a lost weapon. A pistol of any kind will do, and I'll pay a good price. And quick about it, with a dollar extra!"

The woman's eyes twinkled greedily, yet she hesitated.

"I da'sent sell ye a pistol!" she said.

"Why not?"

"Hank will jaw me if I do!"

"Let him jaw!"

"And I ain't got only one. He's got t'other."

"One's enough, my woman. But don't Quaker about it all night. Give me something that will shoot, if it's a dynamite cartridge. Fifteen dollars—say the word!"

"Twenty," whispered the woman. "Five to stop Hank's growlin'!"

"All right. Trot out the gun, with something to load it with. I'm in the biggest kind of a hurry."

The woman disappeared with alacrity, and soon returned with a revolver, which Sam hurriedly examined. It seemed to be a new one, and the box of cartridges which she handed him had not been opened.

"It's loaded—thirty-two bore—bran-fired new!" she declared, as he handed her the money.

It was a good price to pay, but Sam had a feeling that it might prove a good investment for him in the end.

He did not wait to bid the woman good-night, but hurrying out to where he had tied Wildfire, looked to see if the barge had gotten across the river.

It had just touched the opposite bank, and one of the men was in the act of leading Max ashore.

The river at that point was something less than four hundred yards wide. Sam crouched close to the ground, and then shouted, at the top of his voice:

"Fetch back that team! I'll find a way to stop you if you don't!"

The one who had started to lead the horse ashore was seen to

pause, while the other stood at the stern of the barge, as though waiting for orders.

But no reply came back. Even at that distance Sam could see which was Cashin. It was the latter who had Max by the head.

"You hear what I say?" Sam shouted again.

This time Cashin gave an order of some sort to the ferryman, and proceeded to lead the horse ashore. Sam took out his new pistol, cocked the weapon, and fired a shot in the air.

Of course he did not intend to shoot toward the horse-thief, for in doing so there was a greater probability of hitting the horse than the man, and he did not wish to do violence to either.

But the flash of the weapon, with the spiteful report, which sent its echoes startlingly along the beautiful valley, lent a sort of emphasis to the boy's threat. And Cashin evidently hesitated, at a loss whether to take the risk of carrying out his bold undertaking.

The ferryman had a lantern, and by its light Sam could observe their movements with absolute distinctness.

The darkness was deepening momentarily. The jockey realized that the chances of Cashin's escape were greatly assisted by this fact.

Sam grew more desperate every instant. He saw Cashin hitching Max to the sulky. The ferryman stepped upon his barge and began slowly to propel the craft in a homeward direction.

"Fetch your boat over here lively!" Sam called to him, inspired by a hope of being conveyed across the river, so as to resume the pursuit before the thief could get far.

"Want to cross?" the man asked, as he accelerated the speed of the boat.

"Yes, and it will be big money for you to accommodate me. That isn't all—if you help that thief to get away you'll have some constables onto you within twenty-four hours. So put in the licks with that oar!"

"Hank" seemed to be impressed by the double inducement proposed by the young jockey. Probably Cashin had not taken him into his confidence, and he did not know that it was a boy instead of a man with whom he had to deal.

The ferryman quickly reached the spot where Sam was standing.

By this time Wildfire was in a highly nervous condition, and it was with difficulty that the boy could persuade the animal to go aboard the barge. And once aboard, our hero had his hands full to restrain the colt from jumping overboard.

However, the transit was made in safety. Sam landed and mounted Wildfire, whose confidence in her young master increased the longer they were together.

Hank gave the boy jockey directions concerning the roads in the vicinity, and made several suggestions which might aid in the pursuit of the thief.

Then our hero rode away upon a lonely stretch of road that ran in a course nearly parallel with the river, while the rain beat in his face and the darkness settled like a pall over the landscape.

Half an hour later he espied an old farmhouse, setting well back from the road, and which presented a deserted appearance.

The hour was not yet late, yet no light gleamed from the windows of the dwelling. The night was cool and damp, but no white wreath of smoke curled upward from the throat of the great chimney.

A tumble-down barn stood near the house. The premises were those of one of the "deserted farms" which one may find here and there even in the most prosperous sections of New England.

Again Sam looked for tracks, but this time he took care to shield the light from observation, and to extinguish it imme-

diately. For he saw the footprints of a horse, freshly made, and leading up to the deserted dwelling.

The boy jockey led Wildfire into an adjacent thicket and carefully tethered the animal. Then he approached the old house.

He stepped in and stood listening for a moment. No sound came from within. All was dark and still.

The lantern was not lighted, and Sam decided to reconnoiter the barn before searching the interior of the house. He accordingly closed the door, and made his way toward the outbuildings.

As has been already hinted, the latter were not in so good repair as the house. The old barn was ventilated upon all sides with loose battens, which kept flapping noisily in the night wind. The great doors were half off their hinges, and one of them stood ajar.

Sam approached it and thrust his face up to the opening. He recoiled with a low ejaculation of dismay, while his hand flew to his weapon.

A tall form stepped halfway out and stood fully revealed. And in the rear of this figure another face was thrust out from the darkness of the interior of the barn.

Sam drew his pistol, but thrust it out of sight in the same instant, for he recognized both the form, which stood fully revealed, and the face peering out from beyond.

"Ragsdale and Talway Tripp!" broke from the astounded lips of the boy jockey.

In the same breath he was grasping the outstretched hand of his employer, who gave him a hurried pull that drew him within the building.

"Say it softly, my boy!" Mr. Ragsdale exclaimed, in a low voice. At the same time Tripp touched our hero on the arm in a friendly way, saying:

"We're mighty glad it's you, and I guess you're rather tickled that we're us—eh?" And Tripp chuckled good-humoredly.

"It is a surprise party for me, anyhow," said Sam. "And if you would be kind enough to let a little light on the subject, I'll return the favor in the same line."

"We don't want too much light here just now," Tripp replied. "You see," he continued, "we are just watching the course of events, and we don't care to have the people over yonder know what we're at."

This speech only made Sam's mystification the more dense, and he turned to Mr. Ragsdale for an explanation.

A suspicion that he had missed the trail of Cashin, after all, and that he had struck that of Ragsdale and Tripp instead, dawned upon the troubled mind of our hero. For the moment he felt almost as though his friends were responsible for a blunder that might end in the loss of his horse and the escape of the ruffian who had stolen it.

"It is a short story I have to tell, Sam," said Mr. Ragsdale, in his quiet way.

"After you left me, agreeing to return with a team and give me a lift on my journey toward the Canada line, I waited rather impatiently, and at last started out cautiously in the hope of meeting you. I had gone but a little way when I met Tripp here, with a horse and buggy. As he told me that Steve, the nephew of Jack Gardner, met him a few minutes before and told him of the trick played upon you by that wolfish follower of Bamford Brayles, and that you had started in pursuit of the scoundrel with Wildfire. Of course I didn't blame you, under the circumstances; and Tripp, here, being in a venturesome mood, proposed that we follow on and be ready to help you out if it came to a pinch. Not finding the ferryman on duty we kept on up stream to the bridge and crossed there. Tripp says he knows the country about here like a book."

"Then perhaps he knows something about this old house," said Sam, who was relieved to find that he had not been following the wrong trail.

"I happen to know that it has been the shelter of a blooming lot of tramps at one time and another," Tripp replied.

"The barn seems to be covering a pretty fine crowd of them now," remarked Ragsdale, whose spirits seemed to be reviving under the stress of his misfortunes.

"What I want to know most is, if my horse is here, and if the thief is in the house yonder?" was Sam's query.

"I fancy your horse isn't far off," Tripp replied. "And as for Cashin, we're sure that he is hiding in the house. That isn't the whole story, though. We have reason to think he has somebody with him. It looks as if he steered straight for this place when he left the stable with your nag."

"Then it'll be a fight for me to get my team, and a hot one, too," said Sam.

He lighted his lantern and flung its rays about the interior of the great barn.

"Moldy hay, an old pitchfork, a scythesnath and two wagon-spokes!" he remarked, taking a rapid inventory of the visible contents of the building.

"Got any pistols?" he inquired of his companions.

Ragsdale nodded, but Tripp shrugged his shoulders with a humorous twist of his lips.

Sam examined his pistol, and, turning the wick of his lantern low, he secured the latter under his jacket, so that it could be brought into use at short notice if need be.

With a parting warning "to be careful," ringing in his ears, he sallied forth from the barn, and by a short detour approached the ell of the house.

There was a wide door in the ell.

This was closed, but like the other which he had tried, Sam found it unfastened.

Pausing to listen, he next softly opened the door—or tried to open it softly, for like the other, the hinges gave out a startling piercing squeak.

He stepped boldly in, leaving the door open. As he did so his ears were greeted by a sound that filled him with a stronger determination than ever.

It was the whinny of a horse, from a point close at hand. Such an appeal from any animal of the equine race had the power to arouse Sam at any time.

Sam took two or three hurried, rapid strides in the direction whence the sound had come. He was brought to a stand by a collision with another human figure which was coming with equal speed and noiselessness toward him.

The unseen enemy uttered a gruff imprecation and attempted to grapple with the boy jockey.

The latter, however, slipped out of the man's grasp with the nimbleness of an eel, and with swift, silent strides, approached the spot where the stolen trotter was standing.

Sam's outstretched hand touched the horse. At a leap he reached the animal's back, and before the one who had attacked him could divine what was occurring, Max was walking toward the exit, with his young owner leaning forward upon his neck.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE DESERTED FARMHOUSE.

It was so dark that Blue and White Sam had to trust entirely to the instincts of his horse to lead him to the door. If the animal were at fault, or uncertain of what his young master required, failure in the bold attempt would be sure.

"Halt!" commanded a voice just ahead.

Sam drew his revolver, and now he silently held the weapon in readiness to resist interference.

Peering ahead, his eyes perceived the open door, for a grayish gloom instead of the intense blackness within prevailed outside.

Instantly he gave the horse a silent signal that caused the animal to spring fleetly toward the door, his iron-shod hoofs making a great clatter along the floor, and echoing through the empty rooms.

It was a bold stroke. Sam's heart seemed to beat almost as audibly as the hoof-strokes of the horse. He knew that the unseen foe might quickly win the day by shooting Max, for such a generous mark could hardly be missed, even in the dark.

Yet that were a hazardous stroke for even a horse-thief to perpetrate. Cashin was unquestionably a brutal villain, capable of any rascality. But he was not a fool, and of course he would take care to protect himself with a measure of ordinary prudence.

The horse was nearly to the door, and Sam felt that a great feat was almost as good as accomplished.

Then the boy felt a powerful hand seize his leg. There was a sudden wrench, with the horse pulling forward and Sam digging his knees into the animal's sides to keep from losing his seat. Then something struck him a dizzying blow in the face, and he dropped to the floor as if he had been shot.

A harsh shout sounded in the ears of the young jockey, mingled with the rapid clatter of horse's feet.

"Stop 'em—stop 'em!" yelled the voice of Cashin.

There was an answering shout which Sam did not understand, and then he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps, the banging of a door, and lastly, the report of a revolver.

All this followed so rapidly that the boy had not time to comprehend what had happened. His brain whirled from the blow he had received, and numberless stars seemed to be dancing before his vision.

Through it all, however, he realized that he was still in the old house, and that Max was not in his possession. And as he struggled to his feet, and found himself enshrouded in darkness, it occurred to him that the stroke he had received had not been from his enemy. In the struggle to maintain his seat upon Max's unsaddled back, with the man dragging at his leg, Sam had raised himself just as the horse was passing through the doorway. By this involuntary act his forehead was brought forcibly in collision with the top of the door casing.

This was the blow which so nearly stunned him, flinging him from the back of the horse.

Once more upon his feet, Sam groped for the door, which had evidently been shut during the momentary interval of partial unconsciousness which he had suffered.

He found the latch of the wide door, but after fumbling with it for a moment, he understood that it had been fastened in some manner.

He then felt for the lantern, which he had so carefully attached to his suspender, under his jacket. At the same time he noticed the strong odor of burned wool, and his hand came in contact with something that burned.

In a flash he had torn open his jacket. As he did so a warm smudge arose to his nostrils, and there was the rattle of broken glass falling upon the floor.

In his fall the glass globe of the lantern had been broken, and some of the oil spilled upon his clothing. The wick, turned low, was burning, and thus his oil-saturated jacket had been ignited upon the inner side.

Being buttoned so tightly around him, the fire had little chance

to spread, and he now quickly extinguished what there was of it by rubbing it vigorously together.

All this occupied but a moment of time; but it was a vexatious delay all the same. And it was sufficient to give his enemy time to regain the advantage which he had lost.

In falling, also, he had dropped his revolver, and he had to grope about upon the floor to recover that.

At this moment he heard the slamming of a door somewhere in that part of the house, and a thin column of light flashed through a crevice, showing him dimly the character of his surroundings.

The footsteps of two or three men were approaching, and there was not a moment to be lost.

He again tried to open the large door. There was not light enough to show him how it was fastened, and there was no time to experiment. He believed that Max had trotted out of doors when he was thrown from the horse's back, and that Cashin had followed to recover the animal.

If this were the case, Sam could only hope to regain possession of his property by remaining upon the premises and making another attempt.

He was in a long, narrow hallway, at the farther end of which Max had been standing at the moment Sam discovered him.

The wide door opening out of doors was at his right, as he faced down the corridor. There was another door nearly opposite, standing ajar, and opening at the top of a staircase leading downward.

He started down and quickly completed the descent.

He was in a long, narrow cellar, whose only contents seemed to be a few empty barrels, and a large, old-fashioned meal chest.

On one of the inverted barrels a small kerosene lamp was burning, showing the surrounding objects with sufficient distinctness.

"These quarters will do till I can get out of them, as the fellow said when they put him in jail," Sam observed, as he hurriedly surveyed the dismal place, at the same time hastily deciding what to do in case he were followed hither by the men who were tramping heavily along the passage overhead.

While listening alertly for the movements of his enemies, he leisurely examined the objects in the cellar. There was nothing significant about any of them, as they were probably articles which the last tenants of the dwelling had thought valueless, and so had left them to be disposed of as the next occupant might see fit.

Sam took up the lamp and raised the lid of the chest.

The latter, at first glance, seemed to be half-full of some kind of grain. He examined a handful of it more closely, and decided that it was malt. What surprised him was the fact that it had no musty odor, seeming, therefore, to be fresh.

While meditating upon this somewhat curious discovery, he was recalled to his own danger by the opening of the door at the head of the cellar stairs.

Instantly replacing the lamp on the inverted barrel, Sam quickly raised the lid of the chest against the wall, sprang into the receptacle, and then drew the cover down tightly.

"Cramped quarters," thought Sam. "And it might be better for me to stay out in sight and face the music. But what I'm after is to find how many there are of these fellows, and what they're up to, playing at the game of spook in this old house."

The men were speaking, and with no attempt at caution.

Sam distinguished three distinct voices, one of which he identified as that of Caleb Burton, whom the reader will recall as the self-styled guardian of Genie North, at whose lonely hut Bamford Brayles did so much of his plotting against Mr. Ragsdale before the opening of the race.

Sam was not surprised to find that Burton was in league with Cashin in whatever villainy the latter might be engaged.

They were certainly "birds of a feather."

The boy likewise recalled what Genie had said concerning her guardian, that there was so much plotting going on in which he seemed to have a share, that she was afraid for her own life.

"Cashin was a pesky fool to fetch that hoss here in the fust place!" Burton declared, as he reached the foot of the stairs.

"That's so," agreed one of the others. "If he had a grudge to work out against the youngster, on his own account or anybody else's, he had no business to ring us into it. Hosses is big plunder—too big to handle in our line."

"Too big to hide in a chist," returned Burton, with a chuckle.

These last words sent a vague, startling suspicion to the brain of the boy jockey.

"This is a chest," he swiftly reasoned, "and I'll go something big that there's something in it besides me and the malt!"

The few utterances of Caleb Burton and his companions which he had overheard, taken in connection with the other signs of lawlessness, told the young jockey that he had stumbled upon the rendezvous of a small gang of outlaws.

They seemed to be busily engaged about something, and only an occasional remark was exchanged between them.

But at last Burton spoke.

"We can't find a safer place for puttin' our stuff than here. But that box ain't secure. The quicker we git that hole dug out the better. Then we'd better leave the old ranch for a spell and let suspicion cool off. It wouldn't be a bad idee for the old house to ketch afire one of these days."

"A tramp might set it with matches—the old excuse, you know," said one of the other men, with a laugh.

"Jest the idee! Jest the idee!" said Burton.

"Hand me the pick," ordered one of them. "And," he added, "help me to move these stones. Careful, for we don't want to fetch the whole wall down onto our heads the first hitch."

Thump, thump, sounded the pick, with which one of the men had begun to dig near the wall of the cellar which was farthest from the hiding place of our hero.

For half an hour they kept engaged in the same manner. Then there came sounds from above, and to the relief of Sam, Burton exclaimed:

"Cashin has come, and I guess he got the hoss ag'in. I wish the critter had got away. As long as he stays here there's a chance of that boy comin' after him, and like enough, fetch a constable along. We'd better go up and find how matters stand. It would be jest as well if Cashin didn't know too much, anyhow, for he belongs to Bamford Brayles, pretty much!"

"We'll go up," was the reply. And Sam heard them ascend the stairs.

"Now is my chance!" muttered the boy jockey.

With a sigh of intense relief he flung up the lid of the chest and straightened his cramped and aching limbs.

The lamp had been carried away by Burton, and the place was intensely dark.

Sam immediately began to dig into the malt in the bottom of the chest, using his hands for the purpose.

He worked rapidly, and was quickly rewarded by finding at one end of the chest, and well covered by the grain, what appeared to be a small, iron-bound cask.

The latter was about the size and shape of a hundred-pound cask of white lead, such as is used in mixing paint, and which most of my readers have doubtless seen.

It had no bail or handle of any kind, and Sam found that it would be all he would care to lift from the bottom of the chest.

"I guess I won't try to stuff that package into my pocket this time," muttered Sam.

Without hesitation he hurriedly covered the cask with the malt as he had found it, and then groped his way toward the side of the cellar where the men had been digging.

His purpose was to locate the hiding place which was being prepared for the mysterious cask which Burton and his companions seemed to value so highly.

"Whether the thing is full of gold, lead or old junk, we're going to see the inside of it before we're many days older," Sam declared, as he cautiously struck a match.

Two large stones had been removed from the cellar wall, and an excavation about four feet in depth was made horizontally in the earth. Evidently this was about as far as they intended to dig, and that it was their purpose to place the cask in the remotest end of the opening, and fill it with the earth which had been removed, replacing the stones of the wall last.

This, after the building had been burned, and the *débris* fallen into the cellar, would make as perfect a hiding place as human ingenuity could conceive of. The wisdom of Burton's crafty suggestions was apparent to Blue and White Sam.

"Now for Max, and a skip for liberty!" said the latter, extinguishing the match and thrusting the remains into a pocket so that it should not betray him.

There were plenty of sounds audible above, and Sam knew that the most hazardous part of his undertaking was before him.

He silently ascended the stairs, reached the passage which led from the entrance to the ell, to the main part of the house, which was now lighted by a reflector lamp, attached to the wall.

He was not sure that the horse had been taken into the house this time. Indeed, he had heard no sounds to indicate the animal's presence. By the light Sam could see how to unfasten the outside door. The fastening proved to be a simple wooden button over the iron latch, and this he hurriedly turned so that the door might be flung open without an instant's loss of time when he was ready for flight.

He then made his way along the corridor to the side room in which he had chanced to find Max an hour before.

The horse was not there. The door stood ajar, and the light from the hall rendered objects visible.

"The horse is outside this time," he reasoned. "That is, if Cashin got him back. And it looks as if this was a fine time for me to go out and drink in the fresh air."

He turned to the exit, opened it silently and stepped forth. At the same time he heard the stamping of a horse close at hand.

He noticed a small shed at the end of the house. A few strides carried him thither; and there stood Max, hitched to the sulky.

The horse was tied by a weight. Sam's knife cut the tie-rein; he sprang into the sulky and took the reins with a thrill of triumph; but simultaneously a man arose out of the darkness and exclaimed:

"Stir from that seat, and I'll shoot your horse!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIGHT AT THE FARMHOUSE.

The threat of the man who evidently had been lying in wait for our hero was effectual, for the moment at least.

Had his own life been threatened, Sam would not have hesitated to draw his own weapon and take the risk of an exchange of shots. But the fear of injury to Max held the young jockey to the seat as if he had been glued there.

"Thought you had the nag sure this time, didn't ye?" the man exclaimed, as Sam remained silent and motionless in the sulky.

"Well, I don't seem to be letting go of him very lively, do I?" Sam retorted.

The latter only wished to gain time—to catch the other off his guard. His hand was upon his revolver under his jacket, and while he did not wish to do any killing, he was ready to cripple his man if need be.

At the same time he was anxious to signal to his friends in the barn.

They must have been concerned about his safety all this while, and he wondered that they had taken no action to find how he had fared in the bold attempt which he had dared to make alone.

It had ceased raining outside, and Sam judged that the night must be well advanced in the small hours.

"You better be getting out of that sulky, boy," said the man, who appeared to be waiting to see if Sam would make a rash attempt of some sort.

"What if I stay where I am?" Sam asked.

"It ain't a matter of your choice," was the reply. "And I'll give ye warnin' that the slickest way for ye to git out of your present pickle is by mindin' what you're told to do, and makin' use of your sense instead of your cheek. Do ye see the p'int?"

"If I does what you tell me to, then what?"

Sam put the query so mildly that the other was convinced of his own ability in quelling the spirit of a plucky youth.

"Wall," drawled the other, "if ye git out of the sulky and are willin' to submit to the 'thority of yer elders in a matter that ye'll know all about when I tell ye, I guess ye'll come out of the scrape with a whole head and more wisdom inside of it than ye started with."

"That's handsome, sure," said Sam, whose wits were more lively than his tongue just then.

Now that he had betrayed the man into a fit of talking, the other had abandoned his effort to disguise his speech, and he spoke with the Yankee drawl, which betrayed his identity.

"It's Burton himself!" thought Sam. "He thinks he is such a crafty old coon, and so much sharper than Cashin and everybody else, that he laid this little trap for me on his own account. Likely he thought I slipped out of the house the same time the horse did, and that I was hanging around here waiting for Cashin to bring the horse back. But as it happens, there is an idea in my noddle that Caleb the wise hasn't caught onto yet."

"You git outer the sulky and quit gassin'," the man ordered, in a more imperative tone.

"All right—jest as you say, not as I care," Sam retorted, imitating the other's drawl.

So saying, Sam slowly alighted from the vehicle, while Burton, eying him like a hawk, advanced with pistol held in readiness for instant use.

"Ye've got a revolver there, hain't ye?" he demanded.

"Supposing I have?"

"Ye must give it up."

"Right off this minute?"

"Quick as ye can git it outer your fingers."

The weapon was already in Sam's grasp, and now, as if he were in mortal fear of Burton, he slipped it from under his jacket and let it drop to the ground.

In doing so, however, he allowed it to be discharged as it fell, seemingly by accident.

His object was to signal his friends, whom he supposed to be waiting in the barn.

Burton, startled and angry, sprang forward to pick up the pistol that lay at Sam's feet.

The young jockey expected this, and as the man stooped in front of him, he made an agile spring, alighting upon Burton's rounded shoulders, and clasping his arms tightly around the ruffian's neck.

Burton, in early life at least, had been trained in the hard toil

of farm life, and was possessed of a powerful, though somewhat clumsy body.

Could he have grappled with Sam fairly, the latter would have received some rough handling. It would have been like falling into the embrace of a furious bear.

But as it was, Burton writhed and shook his powerful frame, striving vainly to twist his arms around so as to seize the nimble form that was clinging like a leech to his back.

"Yah—yah!" he roared, forgetting prudence and everything else in the desperation of the moment. "Let go, ye scamp! Let go, or I'll twist yer head off'n ye! D'ye hear me?"

"Twist away then, and quit gassin'!" mimicked Sam.

There was a sound of hurriedly approaching footsteps. The light of a lantern glimmered outside.

Sam was not elated at the sight of the approaching light, since it indicated that Burton, instead of himself, was about to receive reinforcements.

The man, bending under the burden upon his back, staggered forth from the shed. At the same time Sam sharply cried:

"Hi, Max!—back—sh—back—sh—back!"

The command reached the sensitive ears of the horse, and the well-trained animal immediately began to back with the sulky from under the shed.

Sam, still clinging to the neck of his enemy, and digging his knees, jockey fashion, into the man's sides, saw that his horse was obeying, and he nerved himself for a spring into the sulky.

He realized that in making such a move there would be great risk to the horse, for Burton was in a mood to seek revenge by a shot at Max the moment he was free.

In the struggle, however, the man had dropped his pistol, and both weapons lay upon the ground, Burton's just outside of the shed and in plain sight.

Sam was all ready for the jump. It was a critical moment. Two men were running toward them from the house, and one was Cashin. The other, upon whom the light of the lantern fell in fitful flashes, was tall, slender, and with a face that caused Sam to stare, almost forgetting the exciting struggle in which he was so closely engaged.

In the midst of his bewildered astonishment he heard another shout, and this time it was the voice of Talway Tripp.

He beheld the latter hurrying around from the rear of the shed, pitchfork in hand.

Tripp took in the situation in a second. Seeing the revolver on the ground, he flung down the pitchfork and seized the weapon. At the same instant Sam gave Burton a parting dig with his knees, and a tremendous hug with his strong young arms, and then released his frantic foe.

Cashin was almost upon him, and he snatched the pitchfork from the ground. Holding it at his side in a firm grasp, he yelled, at the top of his voice:

"Charge bayonets!"

The words were accompanied by a headlong dash upon Cashin.

The latter, taken by surprise, hurriedly discharged a pistol, and then beat a precipitate retreat, hotly pursued by Sam.

"Drive the others, Tripp! Give 'em a shot if they don't use their legs!" he shouted.

In his retreat, Cashin led Sam nearer to the third man, who had halted in the background, as if he were loath to take part in the fight.

Sam, bent upon obtaining a closer view of this person, and wondering that Tripp had come to his rescue alone, shouted quickly, as the third man abruptly wheeled and hurried toward the house:

"Ragsdale! What are you afraid of? It is Sam—your Sam! What's the matter with you?"

The instant that our hero uttered that name the other sent one quick backward glance at the boy jockey, and then broke into a precipitate run which carried him into the deserted farmhouse and out of sight.

"A traitor—thief!" muttered Sam, in a bitter tone, as he saw Cashin follow the other into the house, while Tripp dashed by closely pursuing Caleb Burton.

The latter made an attempt to stand his ground at the door, but there was a flash and a report from Tripp's weapon, followed by a savage exclamation from the farmer, and the latter limped hurriedly into the house, slamming the door after him.

"Now for Max, quick, before they cripple him with a shot from a window!" cried Sam.

He dropped the pitchfork, sprang into the sulky, told Tripp to "catch on," and in another moment they were speeding toward the highway over the soggy ground.

No shot came from the house. Talway Tripp clung as best he might to the back of the sulky.

Not a word was exchanged until Sam drew up at the thicket where he had left Wildfire.

The latter greeted them with a low, neigh of delight.

The colt had spent so many lonely hours there by the roadside that she evinced almost human pleasure over the return of the boy who had curbed her proud spirits.

"It is Wildfire," said Sam, breaking the silence. "And you had better mount her, and I will keep a grip on my horse now that I have one."

Tripp mounted, and the colt was as docile as could be desired. Not until then did Sam look up at the eccentric jockey and ask, in a low, impressive voice:

"Tripp, where is Ragsdale? Tell me that!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE MYSTERY OF MR. RAGSDALE.

A rosy light flushing the dull clouds along the eastern horizon proclaimed the near approach of dawn.

Something of this flush lighted the faces of Blue and White Sam and Talway Tripp as they looked searchingly at each other. Wildfire smote the ground impatiently with her dainty hoofs, while Max, with drooping head and half-closed eyes, presented an almost ludicrous contrast to the high-spirited colt.

A casual observer would have said that Sam's possession belonged before a plow, rather than with a pneumatic-tired sulky on the racecourse.

"Where is Ragsdale, Tripp?" Sam repeated, as the other made no reply to the first uttered query.

"I don't know, Sam. I wish to blazes that I did!" said Tripp.

"Well, I can tell you."

"Have you seen him?"

"There's something the matter with my eyes if I haven't!"

"Your eyes seem most generally to see straight, Sam. So it is for you to say where Ragsdale is."

"I saw him go into that house jest ahead of Cashin! I saw him fair and square in the face, and hollered his name, but he cut and run as if I had been a gorilla! What do you say to that, Tripp?"

"I'm not much surprised—at least, he has surprised me so many times in one way or another that I'm ready to believe almost anything queer about him."

"But the crowd in that house are a precious crew of what the police in the big cities call crooks. I've been watching them and listening to their talk, and I know."

"I don't doubt it, Sam," said Tripp.

"Then, if Ragsdale trains with them in that way, and skips out

of our way just when we need him, and while we have been ready to do what we could to save him from trouble, he is worse than any ordinary crook! It's worse than a crime to play the sneak against your friends!"

"You're hittin' the bull's-eye, Sam."

"Yet I hate like blazes to think that of him, after he has given me the first chance in the world that I ever had. He used me white as any man could, Tripp!"

"Me, too, Sam. To tell the truth," Tripp continued, with more earnestness than the eccentric jockey often threw into his speech, "I would have been in the soup, this precious minute, but for Ragsdale. When I first met him I was under arrest for a bit of a tiff with a cop in the city of Trenton. Of course, whiskey made me sassy, but I guzzled the whiskey, and so I was held responsible. It turned out that I had done two or three measly things that the cop could come down on me for, and he made the most of the chance. Ragsdale happened along, he needed a jockey, and took a fancy to me. What does he do but put up the money needed to get me out of the scrape, and hire me at a salary on the spot. I've been with him about ever since. So you see I have even more reason to like him than you have. And yet I've known for a good while that his record wouldn't bear too close looking into."

"But why does he go back on us like this now?" Sam demanded, as he started Max at a leisurely gait along the road.

Tripp rode close to the sulky with Wildfire, so that they could continue their talk.

Day had fairly dawned by this time. The clouds were clearing away, and the sun came out upon the scene.

About a nearby farmhouse there were signs of animation, and the jockeys lost no time in applying for breakfast for themselves and feed for their horses. Both were readily granted, Sam paid the bill, and they were soon ready to return to Springfield.

They had scarcely started upon the road, however, ere they met a carriage containing two men, one of whom wore a badge of authority.

The strangers halted and signaled for the jockeys to do the same. A few discreet questions were put by the former and answered. One of the men was a constable. The latter said:

"I have a warrant for the arrest of one Rufus L. Ragsdale, for theft of a horse. And you'll tell us where he is hiding!"

Blue and White Sam exchanged glances with Talway Tripp.

"You have a level head, Sam," said the other, in a low voice, "and I'll let you do the talking."

"Come," exclaimed the stranger who was in the carriage with the officer, "why don't you make them talk to you instead of letting them mumble together and so agree on a yarn beforehand?"

This speaker had a sharp, crisp voice, and keen, bright eyes. Sam mentally set him down as a detective from one of the great cities.

"You seem to be pretty sure that I know where Mr. Ragsdale is, and I suppose you'll make me tell whether I know or not," said Sam, quietly.

"We know that you started out to carry the man across the line into Canada," said the constable. "And knowing so much to start with, it looks likely that you can tell us what we want to know."

"Well, you're mistaken. I don't know where Mr. Ragsdale is at the present minute, and I never expect to know, unless it is by chance."

"You deny agreeing to carry him to Canada, then?"

"I did agree to do it, and I would have kept the agreement if my horse hadn't been stolen."

And Sam gave a brief but truthful account of the stealing of Max, and his pursuit of the thief. He omitted such details as related to Mr. Ragsdale, and to his own discoveries within the deserted farmhouse.

"I was informed of the theft," remarked the constable. "I intended to pull in the thief while I was about it on this trip, and so kill two birds with one stone. You're a mere boy, and they say you rode an honest race at the track the other day, besides showing up the fraud of another jockey. I've nothing against you, only that you pledged yourself to stand by your employer, who turns out to be a Jersey City crook. That is all. I think you know more than you have told me."

Sam hesitated. He felt that Ragsdale had ill-requited the risk he had undertaken in the man's behalf; yet he could not bring himself to punish him for his treachery.

"I tell you the truth when I say that I don't know where you will find Ragsdale," he declared.

"You saw him last night?"

"Yes, and not many hours ago. He was with me for a short time while I was looking for my horse. I left him, expecting to find him there when I came back; but he skipped somewhere, and I tell you the truth when I say I don't know where he went, nor why."

Sam's assertion was too frankly spoken for the constable to doubt it. He held a brief consultation with his companion.

The latter, with a wider experience among criminals, was less easy to convince that one who had pledged himself to aid the fugitive would now tell all he knew about the latter without compulsion.

"Better take the boy along with us, and then, if we have trouble finding our man, we can squeeze a little more information out of him," said the detective—for such the stranger was in reality.

"I don't like to make him trouble if he is really all right," said the more kind-hearted constable.

The latter, indeed, had been a witness of the exciting race at the track. He couldn't quite bring himself to persecute a young fellow who could win such a race.

The two discussed the matter in a low voice.

Sam looked at Tripp—made a furtive but significant gesture, to which the elder jockey nodded assent.

Sam drew upon the reins, and Max took the hint. Tripp did the same, and Wildfire broke into a run with a suddenness which took the officers by surprise.

Both the sulky and the saddle horse were quickly speeding along the road, leaving the officers to stare after them.

The constable was seen to turn his team about, and a feeble attempt was made to pursue. At the same time the two men shouted for the runaways to halt.

"I guess not," said Sam. "That detective is too mighty anxious to get on familiar terms with me, and our time is money in these days. Ah!—the scoundrel!"

Sam's last exclamation was elicited by the sharp report of a revolver in the hand of the detective!

"If he puts a bullet into Max, he'll pay for it!" cried Sam, a flush of indignation coming into his face.

"He didn't aim within a rod of us," said Tripp. "He just did it for a bluff. And if they want to try a race with us along here they'll have a pretty chance to see the kind of horse meat we do business with!"

The shot was not repeated. As Tripp declared, it was fired for a scare, in the hope of "bringing them to."

Nor did the officers continue the pursuit, which would manifestly result in an overwhelming defeat.

Sam saw them turn back and drive away at a rattling pace, soon disappearing around a bend in the road.

Sam and his companion kept on at a fair pace for a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time they entered a strip of woods, where the branches of the trees overhung the road.

Suddenly Wildfire shied and began to rear with a suddenness that nearly unseated her rider.

Max showed no fear of anything. Indeed, unless there were signs of a race at hand, the trotter bore all the outward signs of a confirmed "plow-jogger."

A clump of shrubbery just ahead of them gave forth a rustling and snapping as of some one trying to push a way hastily through it. And to the intense amazement of Sam, who was the first to observe the sounds, a man stepped forth, holding up his hands in a peculiar way.

"Ragsdale!" gasped Sam and Tripp, in the same breath.

The young man advanced, a faint smile wreathing his lips.

"I turn up in unexpected places," he said, "and in unlooked-for ways. I suppose you met those officers who think they need somebody of my name?"

"We met them," said Sam. "And I did you the favor to let them hunt for their own clews. Now I guess you had better do us the favor to let us know as little about you as you can. Next time I'm going to tell all I know if I'm asked about one R. L. Ragsdale!"

Sam's employer continued to smile, although there was a somewhat sad expression behind the attempt to appear cheerful. He came up to the sulky and laid one hand on Sam's knee.

"So you think I've proven myself unworthy of your confidence?" he asked, in his low, calm tones.

"It begins to look that way, Mr. Ragsdale."

"And you begin to believe that Bamford Brayles was in the right and I in the wrong?"

"No, not that. Brayles is a villain, and he played an under-handed game. I ain't sorry I helped you win that race, and to get the best of him."

"Because I paid you for it, I suppose?" returned Ragsdale, reproachfully. "You are glad I gave you a chance to start in life, even though I'm a black sheep myself! I see. And now that there seems to be a poor show for your gaining anything by standing up for me, you'll turn in with my enemy and help him to do to me what he has been plotting to do for several years?"

"No, no!" cried Sam. "I don't mean that. I don't side with Brayles. But when I see things myself that look mighty crooked—"

"Then you take it for granted that what they say about me is true," interrupted Ragsdale, with a smile. "That is the way most people do," he added. "And that is why a man finds it so hard to clear himself of a false charge."

"See here," cried Sam. "There's no use in beating about the bush. I left you and Tripp in the old barn with the understanding that you would come to my assistance if I signaled to you—didn't I?"

"Yes. And instead of staying till you called I slipped away on my own account."

"That ain't all. I found out that the deserted house was the headquarters of a crowd of thieves, or worse. And when I was fighting to save my horse from them, I saw you come out with one of them, to help them beat me. When you saw me you—"

"Hold on," Ragsdale interrupted, in his quiet way.

"Well, isn't it all true?"

"It is true in one way, but in another it is not. You never saw me come out of the house with your enemies. I wasn't within a mile of you or the old house at that time."

Sam stared at the speaker incredulously.

"Perhaps I don't know when I see a man's phiz fair and square as I saw yours!" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps you don't, my young friend. And yet I have no doubt but you have pretty good eyes. You were merely mistaken. You saw somebody who looks like me, the same as those officers are after a thief who looks like me, and with whom I have been confounded a great many times."

"And with your name, too?" said Sam.

"Very like mine, save that his name is Rufus while I was christened Roger. Rufus L. and Roger L. are a great deal alike in sound and looks, but Roger doesn't like to answer for all of the sins of Rufus. But you needn't believe me. You said once that you would help me to get to Canada. I do not wish to go there yet. But I do wish to keep clear of those officers a short time longer. You may stand by me now or not, according to the amount of truth you think I have told you in the present case. What do you say?"

A gleam of the truth came like a rift of light into the mind of Blue and White Sam.

"I'll stand by my agreement," he declared. "And if you're fooling me, then so much the worse for you."

In the hurried discussion which followed Tripp took part.

It was decided that a buggy should be purchased if possible at a house nearby, and that Sam should drive with Ragsdale wherever the latter wished to go.

The vehicle was readily procured, and they separated from Talway Tripp, the latter returning with Wildfire to Springfield.

"Now where do you want to go?" Sam asked, when he was alone with his employer.

"Back to the farmhouse where you thought you saw me this morning," was the quiet command.

"That is where the officers went to look for you!" Sam exclaimed, bewildered by the sudden turn of affairs.

"We can't help that. It is where I want to go. You have a nag that will enable us to keep ahead of anything on the road. We don't want to come to close quarters with the constable and his friend, and we must keep a sharp lookout. But back to the old farmhouse we go!"

Mr. Ragsdale talked frankly about the mystery surrounding his own career as they rode swiftly along.

They soon drew near the place where Sam had met with such thrilling adventures in recovering his horse.

Looking toward the point where the deserted buildings were

situated, both Sam and his companion uttered ejaculations of dismay.

Upward from the spot rolled a black volume of smoke, with tongues of red flame shooting upward through it.

Sam recalled what he had overheard while hiding in the cellar of the old house.

"The house is on fire!" he exclaimed. "They're burning it up to hide their treasure!"

Scarcely had the words passed his lips when they heard the sound of running footsteps, and the sharp crack, crack of a rapidly-discharged revolver rang out upon the morning air!

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRUGGLE AND AN ARREST.

Sam and his employer were yet a goodly distance from the driveway which led from the road up to the old farm buildings when the startling sounds smote their ears.

"We had better be getting out of sight!" Ragsdale exclaimed. And Sam hurriedly drove into an opening through the line of broken-down fence and fringe of trees. This brought them out upon an open field which was evidently under cultivation.

Intervening trees cut off their view of the burning house, but they could obtain a fair glimpse of the highway which they had just abandoned.

"If they come this way," Ragsdale said, a tremor of excitement in his voice, "then we shall see who they are, and what is done. But if they go the other—"

"Then we'll miss the picnic," supplied Sam, as the other paused.

Both alighted. There was no need of hitching Max. There was more likelihood of the latter falling asleep than there was of his running away.

Returning to the fence, they stood listening and waiting.

They soon heard the rapid tramp of men running.

In another moment a tall, slender man, without either hat or shoes, dashed into view, and wheeling suddenly, ran directly toward the point where Sam and Mr. Ragsdale were standing.

The fugitive had nearly reached the gap in the fence when another man sprang into view, and with a mighty leap that showed him to be a trained athlete, cleared the space betwixt road and fence, and cut off the flight of the one he was pursuing.

The latter wheeled and stood at bay. In a second he was grappling with the pursuer.

Blue and White Sam witnessed so much with breathless, silent interest. Had his employer not been at his side all the while, he would have felt sure that the desperate fugitive who had been brought to bay by the detective was Roger Ragsdale.

He knew now, however, that what his employer had told him was true—that it was the brother of his friend whom he had seen at the deserted house. And it was this lawless brother who was at that moment making a desperate fight for his liberty with the relentless officer who had followed him so far.

Sam could see that the face of his companion had grown deathly pale, and that he trembled from head to foot.

Officer and fugitive confronted each other with locked arms, their forms swaying to and fro. Then, by an unexpected movement, the fugitive flung his antagonist backward, causing him to trip upon a stone and fall upon his back.

Then the vagabond quickly drew a pistol and took quick aim at his fallen enemy.

"Hold, Rufe! No murder here!"

It was Mr. Ragsdale's voice that uttered the startling command. He sprang forward, struck up the threatening weapon, and the bullet hurtled upward through a treetop.

At this moment Sam saw the detective regain his feet, and in his hand gleamed a revolver. In the confusion of the moment, the officer saw only the one whose opportune interference had saved his own life, and he naturally mistook him for the one he had been trying to secure.

Laboring under this mistake, he was on the point of firing a hasty and deadly shot. But a youthful form sprang upon him as he pulled the trigger.

Again the detective went down, with Sam Talbot's sturdy arms encircling his waist. The shot was fired, but the aim was broken. Yet Roger Ragsdale staggered against the fence with a groan.

The fugitive brother caught him, and for an instant they gazed into each other's faces.

"You—here!" exclaimed the fugitive.

"Yes, and in time to save you from committing a worse crime, I hope, than you have against your record."

"Take this, Roger—I don't dare to keep it!" the other said, placing his weapon in his brother's hand.

"You were hit by the officer's shot?" he added, with sudden solicitude. He seemed to have been calmed by the turn of events, and to have abandoned all attempt to escape.

Mr. Ragsdale raised his left arm, and there was blood oozing through his sleeve.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "I kept the bullet from doing worse work. It will let out a little of the bad blood which I have in me, I hope—that is all."

In the meantime, having accomplished his purpose in diverting the shot aimed by mistake at his friend, Sam nimbly avoided the angry seizure of the detective, who had probably never been taken more completely off his guard than he had been by the boy.

In the brief struggle the detective had dropped the pistol. Sam snatched the weapon from the ground, and as the officer attempted to seize it, it was quickly tossed over the fence and well out of his reach.

The detective naturally supposed our hero to be a confederate of the one he was trying to arrest. But there was no time then to bother with confederates, when the principal was almost in his hands.

In another instant his hand was on the arm of the fugitive, who now made no resistance.

"I submit," said the culprit, who had suddenly fallen into a subdued state. "I know you have no authority to lay hands on me here, but I'm tired of the fight. Bring on your constable and I will submit in due form."

At first the detective thought that the man must be trying to play a trick of some sort. But the fugitive held out his hands, saying:

"Put the bracelets on me before the fever to run away gets the better of me again. The innocent have suffered enough on my account, and now I want to face the music and let others have a rest!"

The handcuffs closed with an ominous click. Then the officer turned to stare at the other Ragsdale.

At the same time he took a photograph from his pocket and glanced from that to the faces of his prisoner and Roger Ragsdale.

"Well," he exclaimed, with a puzzled look, "I'm not sure this blessed minute but I've got the wrong one of you—although there is a different look about you, after all. You, sir, are the man who had a winning horse at the Springfield races the other day?"

"I am Roger Ragsdale," was the quiet reply.

"A brother of my prisoner?"

"Yes. He is two years older than I."

"There must be a mistake somewhere," said the officer. "I received a telegram at Jersey City, saying that the man I was looking for—Rufus Ragsdale—was in Springfield entering horses for a race. Being out of town when the message arrived, I was delayed in coming, and so got here too late to see my man at the race. I saw the one who telegraphed, however, and he said that if I would lie low he would find a way to decoy you into my hands. I suppose he meant your brother, here, though I more than half feel that I may be mistaken even now."

While the detective was speaking, the constable who had accompanied him in the quest of the fugitive drove up with the team. Explanations were in order, and while Sam's employer did not enter into the details of his own history, it was made clear to the officer that they had been purposely set upon the trail of the innocent brother.

"I knew that my brother was in this locality," Roger Ragsdale declared, in conclusion, "and while I did not wish to suffer the penalty for his misdoings, neither did I wish to betray him into the hands of the officers."

"Couldn't you have proven your own identity without betraying your brother?" the detective demanded.

"How could I? You see us together now, and yet you hardly know one from the other. That isn't all. My brother has been concealed in or about the stable which I hired on the outskirts of Springfield for ten days. Bamford Brayles knew he was there. Brayles knows why I wished to save him from arrest. I was the unwilling cause of my brother's downfall, and I had pledged myself to restore him to honor. Now it appears that I must fail!"

The earnestness of the gentleman's speech touched even the caloused sympathies of the detective.

"We'll take you at your word," he said. "And when this man's case comes to trial, you may still have a chance to do something for him without bearing any share of his guilt, or running off to Canada to lead us upon a false scent, as you evidently meant to do."

The detective plainly saw through the intentions of Mr. Ragsdale, and Sam could not help but admire the man's shrewdness. At the same time the keen-witted and indomitable New Jersey officer took special pains to ignore the presence of the boy jockey.

If any one of those present alluded to the part our hero had played in the affair, this detective took no notice of the remark. He did not allow his gaze to meet that of Sam, nor permit his lips to utter his name.

"He is a mighty smart man, with a heap of gall," said Sam to his employer, when they once more found themselves alone. "But he hates like time to look square at a youngster that flopped him onto his back just when he was on the point of doing something brilliant! That's what ails the detective from the land of mosquitoes!"

"His heedless shot might have killed me but for you," said Mr. Ragsdale. "And he might do well to thank even a boy for saving him from killing an innocent man!"

"These smart chaps just want to feel how smart they are all the time!" was the philosophic retort of our hero.

He held a long conference with his employer, telling the latter of what he had observed while hiding in the deserted farmhouse.

"The house is in ruins by this time," said Ragsdale. "By the time, the ashes are cool we'll find what they had hidden in the cellar."

They remained in the vicinity until nightfall. Then they cautiously approached the blackened ruins of the outlaws' rendezvous.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT THE CASK CONTAINED.

Convinced as he was of the great value of his horse, Sam dared not run any further risks of losing him.

Therefore, after returning with his employer to the vicinity of the burned farmhouse, the boy jockey's first precaution was to see that his property was safely guarded.

At the nearest dwelling he found a young man who agreed to look after the team while Sam and his companion were obliged to be away from it.

Leaving the horse and buggy in an obscure spot close at hand, Sam and Mr. Ragsdale approached the ruins of the burned dwelling.

Amid the heaps of ashes a few timbers still smoldered, showing here and there a brightly-glowing spot in the darkness.

The cellar yawned black and uninviting. Sam found a spade and located the spot where the excavation had been made beneath the cellar wall. He then fell to clearing away the *débris* that covered the place.

Mr. Ragsdale stood guard while the boy worked. He watched the swift, vigorous efforts of the young jockey with interest, at the same time keeping a sharp lookout to see that no one approached or observed them unawares.

Many of the stones composing the cellar wall were yet quite hot from the fierce fire which had blazed above them hours before. And, in the heat and darkness, with the ashes flying into his face and eyes, Sam found his task anything but an agreeable one.

He made short work of it, however. There was no difficulty in finding the stones which had been removed and afterward replaced by the men who had made the excavation.

These were so heavy that it was all Sam and his companion could do with their combined strength to remove them.

Then came the work of digging out the loose earth. But this did not take long.

Sam's heart beat fast as he at last found that he had reached the end of the cavity, and that the mysterious cask was there.

"Well, Sam?" queried Ragsdale, as the seconds passed without any demonstration from his companion.

"It is here," said Sam. "But it is wedged in pretty tight, and it is no snap to lift the thing. Here she comes, though!"

As he spoke he brought the cask to light, and with his arms locked around it, clambered over the caved-in rocks and up to *terra firma*.

"Now for the team!" said Sam. "And the quicker we get away from here the better. I feel as if two or three of those ruffians were watching us this minute!"

"Let me carry the thing, Sam! You'll break your back!" Ragsdale exclaimed.

"Let 'er break if it can't stand this lift. No—you let me go ahead with the prize, and you follow me and protect me in the rear. If anybody shoots, just ketch the bullets!"

Sam broke into a run as he spoke, straining every nerve. Ragsdale followed. They were within a few rods of the concealed team, when two men bounded from a clump of shrubbery and dashed in pursuit.

At the same time Ragsdale uttered a cry of warning. Sam did not look back. Instinctively he knew that his apprehensions were being already verified.

"It's that pesky young jockey ag'in!" he heard from the lips of one of the pursuers.

From the other came a savage exclamation like the snarl of an angry dog.

"Burton and Cashin!—and they were trying to guard the treasure!" was the silent verdict of the boy.

The realization lent new fleetness to his feet.

"Hi!" he cried, to give warning to the man in charge of the team. "Make ready with the horse, man, quick!"

The team was quickly brought out. Ragsdale could have reached it first, but he would not leave Sam in the rear.

"Drop the cask!" yelled Burton. "Drop it, or I'll drop you and yer hoss!"

It was the last part of the threat which caused Sam to gasp with apprehension. It was at that moment that he reached the team, and by a last effort of his flagging strength lifted his burden into the buggy.

In another second he was upon the seat, and the reins were in his grasp. Ragsdale sprang in. The young countryman, not a little frightened by the sudden turn of events, scrambled up behind, where he clung with a desperate grip upon the back of the seat.

Away shot Max, as if some sort of a powerful spring, until that moment withheld, was suddenly let loose.

Out upon the road dashed the team; yells of chagrin broke from their enemies; several pistol shots rang out startlingly on the evening air!

"It's a race with bullets this time, old boy!" muttered Blue and White Sam, his face pale with the intensity of that moment's suspense.

But the pursuers quickly desisted from their desperate attempt. Another team appeared with mysterious suddenness in their rear, and as they turned back, disconsolate with defeat, they saw several men leap from a buggy and dash toward them with leveled revolvers.

Cashin, with his dull, brutish instincts, might have resisted, even with such manifest certainty of defeat. But Caleb Burton was too cool a hand in his career to permit it.

He deftly knocked the weapon from Cashin's hand, saying as he did so:

"There's no use buttin' agin' a stun wall with yer head! They've got us where the wool is short this time, and the lighter we drop the better we'll feel!"

Sam and his companions were well out of sight when the arrest of Burton and Cashin took place, and it was not until several hours later, therefore, that they learned of the fact.

The countryman who had assisted them was left at his home with a liberal fee, and Sam and Mr. Ragsdale kept on to Holyoke. There they put up at a quiet boarding house close by an excellent stable.

The safety of Max was first assured; then, in a room by themselves, the boy jockey opened the cask.

The latter contained, most prominent, a quantity of cotton. But this was by no means all.

The cotton was merely used to protect the more valuable contents of which the receptacle contained all that it would hold.

These consisted of gold watches and valuable jewelry, all of it new, indicating most unmistakably that it was plunder from burglarized shops.

"If this stuff belonged to the finder I would have a pretty good haul," said Sam, after they had taken a careful inventory of the contents of the cask.

"But it doesn't belong to the finder," was the decisive response of Mr. Ragsdale.

"And it is our business to report to the authorities, I suppose, and take out our pay in witness fees when the crooks have their trial! That's what makes people like to do what we did last night, and risk having our skin shot full of holes!"

Mr. Ragsdale laughed as they scooped the treasure back into the cask. Within an hour the "find" was reported, and they were quickly relieved of the trouble of guarding it.

The next day they were summoned to appear at the hearing of the outlaws' cases, and Sam earned his witness fee!

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

At the trial of Burton and Cashin it appeared that both were implicated in the numerous heretofore mysterious burglaries of a minor character, sufficiently to warrant a sentence from the judge which should keep them out of mischief for some time to come.

The investigation of the case of Rufus Ragsdale, which had to be made in Jersey City, brought out facts which were damaging to more than one person whom no one had thought of putting under arrest.

It appeared that the two Ragsdales, with Bamford Brayles, were formerly partners in an extensive horse-dealing establishment. They also were together in several racing enterprises, and the firm became involved in losses which left them in debt.

Brayles had abundant capital, and advanced funds to the firm, thus becoming the creditor of the Ragsdales.

Roger Ragsdale determined that the debt should be paid. He worked hard to that end. In a great handicap race he won, and so defeated Brayles, who had a horse entered against his.

This excited Brayles' enmity, and trouble between them became more bitter when the other Ragsdale "skipped" with a valuable horse belonging ostensibly to the firm, although in reality held by Brayles as security for his loan to the brothers. Thus Roger took upon his own shoulders the burden of the whole debt, while Brayles threatened to bring the lawless brother to trial if the whole debt, including value of stolen horse, was not paid within a specified time.

This was the gist of the trouble which hung over the head of Roger Ragsdale. The race which Blue and White Sam won with Jilly was to have discharged the debt. But the treachery of Brayles came near defeating Ragsdale's honorable purpose, and would certainly have done so but for the persistence and jockey skill of Sam Talbot.

Bamford Brayles was so deeply involved in the general crookedness which Rufus Ragsdale's trial brought out that he did not press his own charges against the culprit, and Rufus escaped with a light penalty.

As for Max, the "Canuck" trotter, he turned out to be a prize for his young master, developing such speed under Sam's training that he finally sold for two thousand dollars.

What more need be told of the career of Blue and White Sam?

He has begun it wisely and well, thanks to his willingness to listen to the advice of one who had an unhappy experience.

He still loves horses, and rides them at the track; but there is no danger of his head being turned by his success.

With Mr. Ragsdale he has engaged in several profitable transactions. Talway Tripp, still erratic but kind-hearted, is his friend.

Bamford Brayles has not again crossed their path. They may have other enemies, but they are of a less malignant sort.

We might "end up" by saying that Sam and Genie North were married and "lived happy ever after." But that would be a prediction rather than an accomplished fact.

Sam has not yet turned nineteen, and though he has made his ride for fame and fortune, he is yet too young to settle down in life.

THE END.

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